

Static Moments

Photographic Notions of Time in the Paintings of
Degas, Vuillard, Bonnard and Sickert

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between photography and painting from the mid-nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century. Specifically, I focus on the artistic outputs of four painters, Degas, Vuillard, Bonnard and Sickert, and the different manners in which they incorporated photography within their creative practices. In particular, I concentrate on photography's representation of and relationship with time, discussing this in relation to three concepts, that of the narrative moment, memory and motion; concepts that painters often experimented with and explored during the timeframe mentioned.

Throughout the thesis I examine how the paintings of my selected artists compare and contrast with photographic imagery. By doing so I demonstrate how these artists incorporated and commented on photographic notions of time within their paintings. Three of the artists, Degas, Vuillard and Bonnard, also experimented with photography and I look at how their photographic experiments related to and/or impacted their painting practices. This thesis argues that the selected painters' experimentation with photography did not hinder their creative vision, but rather enhanced it. Further, I comment on how these artists recognised the differences between photographic representations of life and their own visual and emotional experiences, thereby challenging photography's connection with objective truth; an important critique considering that photography was still in its infancy.

INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth-century, revolutionary developments in painting occurred as painters shifted away from the teachings and traditions endorsed by the Academy to explore, instead, such concerns that we now recognise as avant-garde. Expressive rendition of line, colour and form began to dominate over the more conservative approaches of the Academy, whilst popular classical subject matter was replaced by motifs sourced from contemporary life. Artists and critics alike began to criticise the teaching methodologies of the Academy and the ateliers, the main point of contention being the strict set of conventions imposed upon students during their art education. In the atelier – the private studio of an Academician artist – students learnt the principles of drawing by undergoing three phases of study; copying from engravings, copying from plaster casts of classical sculpture and finally drawing directly from a live model. Once a student had developed his drawing skills to a suitable standard he moved onto painting, either painting in the style of his master or copying from a painting on display in the Louvre. A student's education was directed towards the completion of a painting to submit to the *Prix de Rome* – a competition funded by the Academy. Winning the *Prix de Rome* meant that the student secured a place at the École des Beaux-Arts (the Academy) and guaranteed future Academic success.

Some critics considered the Academy's emphasis on copying detrimental to the development of an individual painter's creative vision. Jean-Louis Théodore Géricault – French painter and a predecessor to French Romanticism – criticised the Academic curriculum and its focus on the *Prix de Rome*. He stated,

Having abandoned long since their sensations, none of the competitors have managed to retain their individuality. The same drawing style, the same palette, minor variations in an identical system, even the same gestures and facial expressions, everything that we see in these, the sad products of our schools, seems to come from one source, inspired by one single soul – if indeed one can conceive of a soul here, lost in the midst of such anonymity, struggling to conserve its

faculties and preside over these lamentable works.¹

In his review of the Salon of 1859, French critic Charles Baudelaire was equally critical of the Academy, denouncing student work devoid of innovation and individuality. Baudelaire wrote,

But besides the imaginatives and the self-styled realists, there is a third class of painters who are timid and servile, and who place all their pride at the disposal of a code of false dignity.... these men conform to a purely conventional set of rules – rules entirely arbitrary, not derived from the human soul, but simply imposed by the routine of a celebrated studio. In this very numerous but boring class we include the false amateurs of the antique, the false amateurs of style – in short, all those men who by their impotence have elevated the ‘poncif’ to the honours of the grand style.²

Rosalind Krauss claims that discourse throughout the nineteenth-century stressed the importance of artistic originality and *repressed* the role of repetition during the creative process.³ Géricault’s and Baudelaire’s assessments do support Krauss’ theory as both condemned the repetitive teaching methodologies enforced by the Academy. However, this disparity between originality and repetition had already appeared in critical writing prior to the nineteenth-century. In the eighteenth-century, Joshua Reynolds – British painter and Royal Academician – advised painters not to copy nature directly, instead encouraging painters to exert their imaginative wills. He stated,

The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive: instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, he must endeavour to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas; instead of seeking praise, by deceiving the superficial sense of the spectator, he must strive for fame, by captivating the

¹ This text was found in Géricault’s notebook after his death. It was published in C. Clement, *Géricault, etude biographique et critique*, Paris: Didier et Cie, 1868. Quoted in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, Eds. *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Ideas*, Trans. Jonathan Murphy, Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998, p. 26.

² Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, Ed. and Trans. Jonathan Mayne, Oxford: Phaidon, 1965, pp. 162-163.

³ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1985, p. 162.

imagination.⁴

For Reynolds, artists that employed imitative techniques did so at the expense of their imaginative faculties and artistic credibility. However, not all forms of repetition were frowned upon; Reynolds supported the Academic tradition of imitating classical sculptures and the paintings of old masters.⁵

In the nineteenth-century a new invention was perceived as a threat to artists' originality. Photographic prints began to emerge in the late 1830's, their arrival igniting divided opinion between those who were excited about the new views of life photographs offered and those who were nervous about the impact photography would have on the future of painting. Periodical accounts provide a sense of the nineteenth-century's reaction towards the new medium and the impending doom it potentially possessed in regards to painting's future. In a letter dated 1840, American painter Thomas Cole commented on the early photographic form of the daguerreotype⁶ and its possible effect on painting.

I suppose you have read a great deal about the daguerreotype. If you believe everything the newspapers say, (which, by-the-by, would require an enormous bump of marvellousness,) you would be led to suppose that the poor craft of painting was knocked in the head by this new machinery for making Nature take her own likeness, and we have nothing to do but give up the ghost.⁷

Later in the twentieth-century, French poet Paul Valéry claimed that photography had almost eradicated the need for book engraving, whilst also contributing to what he considered the sorry state of contemporary portrait painting.

⁴ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, Ed. Robert R. Wark, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975, p. 42.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 28-32, 45-50.

⁶ Invented in the late 1830's by Louis Jacque Mandé Daguerre, the daguerreotype was the earliest example of a fixed photographic image. Daguerreotypes are photographs on light sensitive silver-coated copper plates which have been exposed to light and subsequently treated with chemicals to make the latent image appear on the plate. Unlike photographs from negatives, whether glass or film, daguerreotypes are one-offs, multiple reproductions of the photographed scene are not possible.

⁷ Quoted in Louis L. Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, Ed. Elliot S. Vesell, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, first edition paperback, 1997, p. 210.

With photography, most of these artists disappeared [mediocre portrait painters], along with the illustrators, the lithographers, and the wood engravers. At one and the same blow, both the practice of drawing likenesses, and the creation and composition of illustrations were stricken and almost exterminated.⁸

Valéry did concede that photography was not altogether completely responsible for portraiture's decline, 'On the particular point that interests us, one fact, to which I return, is clear enough: *the art of portraiture is no longer what it was*. As I said, the irresistible progress of photography seems to me insufficient to explain this decline.'⁹ Valéry recognised that wider circumstances, related to the changing tastes and values of the era, were as much, if not more, contributing factors.

Photography's invention seemed to increase the need for critical discourse to emphasise and elevate the notion of originality over that of repetition. Baudelaire strongly opposed any consideration of photography as a representative art-form, he disapproved greatly of the medium's inclusion, and the positive reactions generated, in the 1859 Salon:

Now our public, which is singularly incapable of feeling the happiness of dreaming or of marveling (a sign of its meanness of soul), wishes to be made to wonder by means which are alien to art, and its obedient artists bow to its taste; they try to strike, to surprise, to stupefy it by means of unworthy tricks, because they know that it is incapable of ecstasy in front of the natural devices of true art.¹⁰

Baudelaire's attitude towards photography echoes Reynolds' critique on imitative art practices. Photography, for Baudelaire, and imitation, for Reynolds, were methods adopted by artists to endear themselves to the tastes of the general public. Both critics placed higher value on the sensibilities held by artists than those of the general public, as Reynolds demonstrated when he stated that artists should aim to enhance their viewers' mental faculties. However, Baudelaire was more scathing in his opinion on general public taste and

⁸ Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, Trans. David Paul, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 186.

⁹ Ibid., p. 187. Words in italics appear in that format in the source material.

¹⁰ Baudelaire, p. 152.

their ability (or lack of) to appreciate great works of art. Perhaps this strong conviction developed due to photography's rapid rise in popularity, an event that caused some to worry about the future status of painting.

Photography's inclusion in the 1859 Salon proved how the new medium had achieved widespread recognition and acceptance. Throughout the nineteenth-century, new photographic developments continued to emerge, making the photographic process easier, faster and more accessible. Photography was less costly than painting; allowing for higher participation rates through either assuming the roles of photographer, sitter or collector. Due to the medium's mechanical and chemical processes, photography was also less time consuming, allowing budding photographers to render sufficiently a subject's likeness without undertaking the extensive training period endured by painters.

Unlike painters, photographers could produce successful likenesses, regardless of their individual artistic merits. Accepting photography as a valid art-form potentially opened the door for those considered to possess little artistic sensibility to enter into the art world and assume the role of artist. Photography's inclusive nature was then a threat to the special status awarded to artists; a threat Baudelaire clearly acknowledged:

As the photographic industry was the refuge of every would-be painter, every painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies, this universal infatuation bore not only the mark of blindness, an imbecility, but had also an air of vengeance. I do not believe, or at least I do not wish to believe, in the absolute success of such a brutish conspiracy, in which, as in all others, one finds both fools and knaves; but I am convinced that the ill-applied developments of photography like all other purely material developments of progress, have contributed much to the impoverishment of the French artistic genius, which is already so scarce.¹¹

In order to maintain the privileged status of the artist it was crucial to suppress and deny photography's role within the creative process. Photographic imagery became an example of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 153.

what *should not* constitute as being art. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake – English artist and patron of the Society of Female Artists – declared that, ‘When people therefore, talk of photography, as being intended to supersede art, they utter what, if true, is not so in the sense they mean. Photography *is* intended to supersede much art has hitherto done, but only that which it was both a misappropriation and a deterioration of Art to do.’¹² Therefore, according to Eastlake, photography’s invention freed artists from the burden to represent reality, an act that held little artistic merit. Both Eastlake and Baudelaire did recognise photography’s value to the field of science, admitting that the medium’s aptitude at rendering reality could serve science well.¹³

Generally, painters were more open to photography than the critics, recognising the potential it offered to their creative practices. Throughout the nineteenth-century, painters, from Delacroix to Cézanne,¹⁴ employed photographs as study aids. Other painters, such as Degas and Vuillard, experimented with photography, using it as another outlet for their creativity. Artists did not necessarily perceive photography as a threat; instead they recognised photography’s potential as an aid for their artistic development. The camera was already an established tool in painting; the *camera obscura*¹⁵ had been used by painters since the Renaissance. Revered painters, such as Leonardo Da Vinci and Johannes Vermeer, used the *camera obscura* to aid them with the representation of spatial depth and light. In the Renaissance, painters’ incorporation of science and mathematics within the creative process

¹² Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, ‘Photography’, *Quarterly Review*, London, April, 1857, pp. 442-468, quoted in Harrison, pp. 660-661.

¹³ Baudelaire, p. 154, Harrison, p. 660.

¹⁴ See Van Deren Coke, ‘Two Delacroix Drawings Made from Photographs’, *Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Spring 1962, pp. 172-174, and Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph: From Delacroix to Warhol*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974, pp. 7-9, 83.

¹⁵ The *camera obscura* is a box or room into which light enters through a hole, projecting onto the surface the surrounding view outside of the *camera obscura*.

was well known and endorsed;¹⁶ a relationship that received less critical attention than in the nineteenth century where art and science began to become two distinct categories. Because of the emphasis placed on artistic originality and genius during the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, any connections between vanguard painters and photography was often not acknowledged or discussed.

It is the aim of this thesis to discuss the relationship between painting and photography in the period from the mid 1800's to the early twentieth-century. The wide time-span was chosen as numerous photographic developments occurred within that period, presenting new views of life and inspiration for painters. Avant-gardism, and the rise of the originality discourse, also continued to develop within this period, peaking with the modernist period of the 1920's and 1930's. Photography's repetitive nature did not make it a natural ally for the avant-garde painter, yet, despite this, the medium was still popular with painters during this period.

In my investigation I will focus specifically on the notion of time and how photography's expression of time relates to painting's development within the selected timeframe. Time is an important factor to photography, the medium's ability to present suspended moments obtained from real life provided new and intriguing viewpoints throughout the nineteenth-century, and into the twentieth. One of photography's inventors, William Henry Fox Talbot, was motivated by his desire to freeze permanently the scene he viewed in his *camera obscura*.¹⁷ Of photography's invention, Carlo Rimm stated, 'The day photography was born

¹⁶ See Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, Ed. and Trans. Cecil Grayson, London: Phaidon, 1972.

¹⁷ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844, p. 4. Talbot was an important figure in photography's history as he invented the paper negative, using paper bathed in sodium chloride and silver nitrate which produced a light sensitive salt of silver chloride to reside within the paper. Talbot created photographic images by exposing the light's rays directly onto this light sensitive surface until an image appeared. In 1841 Talbot refined his paper negative process with the invention of the calotype negative, which was bathed with silver nitrate and potassium iodide. The calotype was the first negative to capture the reflected light rays into a latent form on the negative surface, until further chemical development revealed the negative's hidden image. For more information see Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, Fifth Edition, 2009, pp. 19-21, 43.

humanity won a precious victory over time, its most redoubtable enemy. To be able to perpetuate for even a relative eternity humankind's most ephemeral aspects, was this not a way of stopping time, a little at least, in its dread course?'¹⁸

Whereas the public, and photography's critics, were concerned with the medium's ability to render likeness, for some painters the suspended moment of the photograph presented a new visual experience, differing from those experienced by the human eye. The static nature of the photograph contrasts with the fluidity of the human eye, constantly in motion as it surveys a scene. These different visual experiences and the isolated moments portrayed in photographs sparked, in certain painters, an interest in how we experience and perceive time. This discrepancy also put into question the nature of reality, a concern also recognised by painters.

Numerous painters incorporated photography into their artistic practices, however, for this thesis I concentrate on four painters: Edgar Germain Hilare Degas, Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard and Walter Sickert. These four painters are connected by the thematic nature of their work, yet their different experiences and relationships to photography provide various examples of how photography contributed to the development of an individual creative vision. I analyse the effect photography had on the chosen artists by discussing their artistic output in relation to three concepts – the narrative moment, memory formation and perceiving motion. Time is an integral component to the expression and perception of these concepts and they were elements often experimented with in painting during the selected time period.

¹⁸ Carlo Rimm, 'De l'instantané', *L'Art vivant*, No. 137, 1st September 1930, quoted in Christopher Phillips, Ed. *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings 1913-1940*, Trans. Robert Erich Wolf, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989, p. 38. The name Carlo Rimm was a pseudonym for Jean Richard Marius, a French filmmaker and writer.

In the first chapter, I discuss how Degas, Vuillard and Sickert represent (or not represent) the narrative moment in relation to photographic notions of time. With photography's invention, certain visual representations of time, such as the isolated moment and the sudden moment, became more prevalent in imagery. Artists who represented these accounts of time no longer prioritised narrative and the fixed meaning within their paintings. Instead ambiguous narratives and the expression of artists' personal experiences began to dominate. In Degas' paintings, isolated moments of time deny viewers a wider context in which to attain a universal meaning. His narratives are not implicit but ambiguous, allowing viewers to respond imaginatively to his paintings. Vuillard also depicted single occurrences of time, shifting the focus away from narrative meaning to emphasise formalist and personal concerns. New photographic developments towards the end of the nineteenth-century, leading to the rise of snapshot photography, made it possible for faster instances of time to be captured and represented within photographs, echoed in the sudden moments of Vuillard's early paintings. These sudden moments represent Vuillard's personal visual experiences of his domestic surroundings. Sickert, following on in a style similar to Degas, also produced paintings with ambiguous narratives, their meanings open to interpretation. However, Sickert's paintings often represent the artist's personal experiences, both visual and incidental, in which photographic studies aided Sickert in conveying these experiences onto canvas.

The emergence of two new photographic genres; snapshot photography in the 1890's and photojournalism in the 1920's, meant that the act of remembrance, practised by the production and collection of visual imagery, reached a wider audience as well as offering different perspectives of people and events not generally seen in painting. Amateur photography's user-friendliness and affordability encouraged more people to engage in creating and collecting visual mementos of their loved ones. Snapshot photography and

photojournalism also offered the fresh perspective of the candid viewpoint; directly obtained from life, rather than the artist's imagination. These photographic images seemed to offer more accurate representations of life than scenes depicted in paintings. Vuillard, Bonnard and Sickert, in their painting practice, all experimented with the photographic notion of memory. Both Vuillard and Bonnard painted from their own photographs in order to represent their past experiences. Their paintings also reveal the disparity between the formation and recollection of memories stored in the mind and those viewed in photographs. Sickert explored the new viewpoints offered by photojournalism, translating photographic imagery into painted form by painting directly from newspaper photographs. His portraits, especially those of British royalty, contrast with traditionally staged portraiture, still customary at the time. Sickert's paintings highlight the alternative visual language found in photojournalism and its contribution to the remembrance of public figures.

Advances in photography's ability to render movement, and smaller segments of time, during the nineteenth-century allowed for the finer mechanics of motion to be revealed. However, artists recognised that the scenes recorded by the camera's static lens contrasted with their own visual experiences; informed both by the fluid motions of the eye and the subjective preferences of the viewer. Degas and Bonnard were two artists who did acknowledge this difference, experimenting with the contrasting visual factors produced by the camera lens and the human eye. By looking at Degas' and Bonnard's photographs and paintings, the third chapter examines how these two artists commented on the nature of the visual experience and emphasised its subjective nature.

FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES: MEANING AND TIME IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING

During the nineteenth-century the traditional conventions of painting were challenged as artists rebelled against the teachings of the Academy. Rather than continuing to represent the narratives and ideologies promoted by the Academy, artists, instead, focused on representing their subjective responses, whether based on visual or imaginative experiences, of aspects of modern nineteenth-century life. These avant-garde artists were more interested in depicting their surrounding environment than in representing conventional Academic subject-matter, themes sourced from Greek and Roman history/mythology or notable works of literature. The moral message or fixed meaning, prevalent in Academic paintings, became less significant as emphasis shifted to the promotion of the individual experience.

Photography was born at a transitional stage in painting's history, emerging in the late 1830's and coinciding with the Romantic period in art – an art and literary movement reacting against the moralistic tendencies of its predecessor, Neo-classicism, to instead focus on the expression of emotion and sentiment. Narrative and moral ideologies were then dismissed as painters explored their personal responses to life. The new medium of photography provided an example of visual imagery not burdened by the narrative traditions of Academic painting. Photography's particular relationship with time means that narratives portrayed within photographs are based on a singular moment; a moment isolated from its surrounding location and events, a moment separated from its overall context.

Since there are often little or no references to past or future events, meaning garnered from photographs can only be sourced from the single moment depicted in the image. This fragment of time is then open to interpretation when presented to viewers unfamiliar with the wider context. Viewers often respond imaginatively to singular narrative moments, devising their own narratives and/or meanings which may or may not correspond with the actual

circumstances. This photographic expression of narrative became a common feature in painting from the nineteenth-century onwards. Degas, who was familiar with the photographic process, employed aesthetic techniques common in photography within his paintings. He focused on a single moment of time separated from the overall narrative; however his paintings still suggest the presence of an underlying narrative. In Degas' paintings meaning is no longer a fixed and concrete concept; instead the meaning is ambiguous, providing fertile conditions for viewers to formulate multiple and various interpretations.

Photographic developments in the final decades of the nineteenth-century made the photographic process faster and more user-friendly. A new photographic genre emerged; snapshot photography, presenting fast and candid moments of domestic life and was (and still is) a popular mode of visual representation. Painters were also interested in the instantaneous views of life snapshot photographs offered; one painter in particular experimented with such viewpoints in his paintings. Vuillard's paintings of the 1890's represent sudden moments of time that express his personal sensations of his domestic environment. Little emphasis was afforded to narrative or meaning. Instead Vuillard depicted moments when the various array of forms at a given moment provided, for him, a visually dynamic scene; a technique that aligns his practice with that of the famed twentieth-century French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson. Vuillard also experimented with the amateur snapshot camera, the resulting photographs also expressing his interest in the various visual relationships present at a single moment of time.

By the time Sickert began painting from photographs, in the early twentieth-century, the medium was almost one hundred years old. Photography's depiction of suspended moments sourced from real life was no longer a new and novel visual experience. However, as English painting had generally followed a more conservative path than French painting, England

spent the early years of the twentieth-century attempting to catch up to the avant-garde developments of continental Europe. Photography's frozen views of life remained a relevant concern at this time in England, and it was this aspect of photography that Sickert utilised. Ideological narrative modes were eschewed by Sickert as he instead focused on representing his responses to events from his life. Photographic studies helped Sickert to recreate such events, often using them to create visual metaphors relating to his personal experiences. Sickert's visual metaphors also encourage viewers to respond imaginatively to the scenarios depicted within his paintings.

DEGAS' *INTERIOR*: REPRESENTING AMBIGUITY

In 1876 French art critic, Edmond Duranty championed Degas for capturing the spirit of their age within his genre paintings. Duranty wrote, 'By means of a back, we want a temperament, an age, a social condition to be revealed; through a pair of hands, we should be able to express a magistrate or a tradesman; by a gesture, a whole series of feelings.'¹⁹ For Duranty, Degas' approach represented the innovative manner of modern artists who had turned their backs on traditional Academic subject-matter to depict, instead, scenarios sourced from modern life. Yet, Degas' focus on gestures was not entirely a new phenomenon, earlier genre painters had already emphasised such details. Consider, for example, Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (Fig. 1) which depicts a woman hunched over her handiwork, her fingers delicately poised as she immerses herself into her task. Or the contrasting body language of the



Fig. 1, Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, 1669-71.

¹⁹ Edmond Duranty, 'The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries (1876)', quoted in Linda Nochlin, Ed and Trans. *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism 1874-1904: Sources and Documents*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 5.

newlyweds in William Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode: Shortly After the Marriage* (Fig. 9). The jubilant bride raises her arms up in the air whilst her groom slumps over in his chair, his posture matching the depressed expression on his face. Degas seems to be following in the conventions of genre painting, using gestures to help express the painting's overall narrative or meaning. However, the narrative, or meaning, is not as apparent in Degas' paintings as it is in traditional or earlier genre scenes. Instead, Degas' meanings are open to interpretation due to how he utilised one important factor: that of time.

Degas' paintings often portray a single moment, freezing his figures mid-action. In *The Laundresses* (Fig. 2), a laundress is frozen at the moment she stops work to stretch her body and ungracefully release a large uninhibited yawn. Paintings such as these offer viewers a slice of modern life. However Degas' suspension of time extends beyond such considerations of formal properties. The paintings' narratives are also frozen at a single point, with little or no indication of past or future events. This limited view means



Fig. 2, Degas, *The Laundresses*, c.1884-86.

that viewers have less information to help them determine what the overall narrative is about. Because of this, when examining Degas' paintings viewers are encouraged to produce various interpretations and meanings. This ambiguity, in regards to narrative, is what sets Degas' genre scenes apart from tradition, and what casts him as an important figure in the development of avant-garde painting.

Duranty did not specifically comment on Degas' utilisation of time, however he did remark on the significance of the fragmented moment portrayed within Impressionism. He stated, 'If

one imagines... that at a given moment one could take a coloured photograph of an interior, one would have a perfect accord, a truthful and typical expression, everything participating in the same feeling.’²⁰ Photography was a constant presence throughout Degas’ life; he was photographed on numerous occasions and collected photographs of different subject-matter. He also kept abreast of new photographic developments, and finally in the twilight years of the nineteenth-century he assumed the role of photographer, experimenting extensively with the medium.²¹ A few of Degas’ surviving photographs indicates that he possibly used his camera to create study aids for his paintings.²² It then seems inevitable that Degas’ sustained interest in photography would somehow manifest itself in his paintings. Art historians often identify Degas’ compositional style as proof of such an influence. For example, Degas gave *Carriage at the Races* (Fig. 3) the candid appearance of a photograph by positioning the carriage in the far right of the composition, abruptly cropping part of the wheels and the second horse out of the frame. Van Deren Coke aligns this development in Degas’ painting practice to the rise in popularity of stereo-camera photography during the 1850’s, which depicted candid views of modern life.²³



Fig. 3, Degas, *Carriages at the Races*, c.1873.

Kirk Varnedoe contests the view held by Coke, and other like-minded critics, in his 1980 article, ‘The Ideology of Time: Degas and Photography’.²⁴ According to Varnedoe, Degas’ candid scenes highlight his figures’ gestures at a given point in time, serving to demonstrate

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹ I discuss in more detail Degas’ photographic practice in the third chapter of this thesis. See pp. 97-107.

²² Again I discuss this in more detail in the third chapter, see pp. 116-117.

²³ Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph*, p. 81.

²⁴ Kirk Varnedoe, ‘The Ideology of Time: Degas and Photography’, *Art in America*, Iss. 68, No. 8, 1980, pp. 96-110. This article was a follow-up to an earlier article, ‘The Artifice of Candor: Impressionism and Photography’, in which Varnedoe dismisses the idea that Impressionists were influenced by photography. See Varnedoe, ‘The Artifice of Candor: Impressionism and Photography’, *Art in America*, Iss. 68, No. 1, 1980, pp. 66-78.

their social status in nineteenth-century France.²⁵ Furthermore, Varnedoe claims that Degas' interest in the instant moment did not derive from photography, instead originating from the nineteenth-century's general scientific interest in motion, preceding photographic developments.²⁶ Varnedoe's point is valid as photography did not initiate the nineteenth-century's interest in motion and instantaneity; rather photography was a useful tool in enquiring and expanding on the nineteenth-century's knowledge of the mechanics of motion.²⁷

Varnedoe is, perhaps, too hasty to dismiss the role photography played in Degas' artistic development. During the mid-nineteenth-century photography was a new, novel and exciting medium; it seems inconceivable that photography's rising prominence would not, in one manner or another, impact contemporaneous painting. Even if we accept Varnedoe's view there is another point to consider. Before photography's invention painting had portrayed single moments often derived from a wider narrative, evident in Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Bolt* (Fig. 4). These singular moments we recognise as being tied to artistic intention, every formal aspect of a painting being deliberately conceived by the artist. Therefore when we analyse Fragonard's *The Bolt* we take into consideration such aesthetic concerns as his



Fig. 4, Fragonard, *The Bolt*, 1777.

figures' body language, details present in the scene (such as the apple on the table to the right and the luxurious fabric framing the bed), lighting, the overall composition and finally the work's title to help us comprehend the work's meaning. Together these factors establish the

²⁵ Varnedoe, 'The Ideology of Time', pp. 97-100.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 104-107.

²⁷ I discuss this topic further in the introduction to the third chapter of this thesis. See pp. 93-94.

narrative as amorous in nature, quite possibly depicting an illicit affair or stolen moment; Fragonard frequently depicted and explored erotically charged themes.

When it comes to representing moments of human drama, the construction process undertaken by painters, and the added factor that they create these scenarios by hand, is widely recognised as containing fictive and imaginative elements. With photography, however, artistic intention is often not as widely recognised, mainly due to two factors; the medium's dependency on the subject's existence in real life and the camera's mechanical processes. Artistic intention is, then, overshadowed by viewers' interest in the appearance of the depicted subject-matter and its connection to reality. Narrative moments in photographs can be interpreted as moments plucked from real life, isolated from the continuous flow of time by photographers. Operating under such assumptions, canny photographers can make fictive scenarios appear as spontaneous moments derived from real life.

Robert Doisneau's famous photograph *Kiss at Hotel de Ville* (Fig. 5) is just one example of a photograph that portrays a fictionalised scene masked as reality. The image depicts a young



Fig. 5, Doisneau, *Kiss at Hotel de Ville*, 1950.

Parisian couple who appear to have stopped impulsively for a passionate kiss. The abrupt appearance of this kiss set against a Parisian backdrop, with its reputation as the city of love, worked together to create an enduring image of romantic love and youthful passion. However, the photograph's creation was far less romantic; the scene was actually staged by Doisneau and does not represent a spontaneous act of

affection at all. By employing the pictorial language of documentary photography, Doisneau created a moment that appears spontaneous and candid, leading viewers to naturally assume

they were looking at an image representing a real and un-staged moment. When the truth about Doisneau's photograph was revealed in 1993, its symbolic status was already firmly established in popular visual culture.²⁸

Doisneau's *Kiss at Hotel de Ville* illustrates the distance that exists between photographic scenes and viewers' interpretations. Since the majority of viewers were not present at the time Doisneau took the photograph, the wider context that informed the photographed moment is beyond the grasp of viewers' awareness. With no indicators of past and/or future events, all that viewers have to ascertain the work's meaning is the here and now in the depicted moment. It is this factor of photography that is also prevalent in Degas' paintings. By focusing on an isolated moment, separated from surrounding events, allowed Degas to widen the distance between his paintings and viewers' understanding and interpretation of the overall narrative. However rather than creating a specific narrative, present in Doisneau's work, Degas uses this distance to create ambiguity, thereby, encouraging viewers to form various imaginative responses. When expressing narrative, time was generally an important element utilised by artists. This was especially so with genre painting, which uses time to communicate a moral position or an obvious narrative. Events of the past, present and future are illustrated or suggested by the artist providing viewers with an outline of events or a



Fig. 6, Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, 1732.

plotline; a methodology commonly associated with literature. The plot follows a course of time, with its points of beginning, middle and end. Sometimes genre painters would produce a series of paintings that

²⁸ For more information on the symbolic status of *Kiss at Hotel de Ville*, see Nina Lager Vestberg, 'Robert Doisneau and the Making of a Universal Cliché', *History of Photography*, Iss. 35, No. 2, pp. 157-165.

worked together in expressing an overall narrative, in the manner of a book based entirely on images rather than text. William Hogarth's series of prints entitled *A Harlot's Progress* (Fig. 6) depicts the narrative of a young innocent woman arriving from the country to work in the city. She descends into prostitution, leading, inevitably, to her death. The timeline of events in *A Harlot's Progress* work together to communicate a clear moral message, highlighting the perceived corruptive and dangerous elements that eighteenth-century urban life held for women.

Time is still used as a narrative device in single paintings which do not form part of a wider series. William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (Fig. 7) shows a transitory moment from the painting's narrative. A woman suddenly stands up from the lap of her suitor, her actions, combined with the work's title, informs us that she is experiencing a revelation which frees her from her past promiscuous life, represented by the beckoning arms of her suitor. Her heavenward gaze suggesting she will dedicate her life to living in a virtuous manner. Time, whether expressed through the course of a plotline or in a single moment, aided Hogarth and Holman Hunt, along with the paintings' details and their accompanying titles, in creating narratives with a specific meaning. Since these artists



Fig. 7, Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853.

provided a clear narrative and/or meaning, viewers they are less likely to respond imaginatively to such works, restricting the possibility of multiple interpretations to arise in favour for one universal meaning

Andrew Benjamin claims that these universal narratives are a result of artists applying pre-determined meanings to their paintings. According to Benjamin, the pre-determined meaning

was essential to tradition which relied on repetitive techniques to endorse a dominant ideology.²⁹ The genre tradition, therefore, kept using the familiar element of time, expressed with the plot structure, to ensure the audience clearly understood the intended meanings of the artworks. Degas challenged this tradition by eliminating the narrative device of the plot outline from his paintings. However Degas did not completely eschew narrative altogether, instead presents viewers just one fragmentary moment derived from the narrative. Separating the scene from its wider context means the overall narrative becomes virtually inaccessible to viewers; who are left to speculate on the work's narrative and meaning. Benjamin claims that the avant-garde does not outright resist tradition; to do so would result in works with non-meaning.³⁰ Degas still operated within the boundaries of tradition by alluding to a narrative, however teasingly denied viewers the full context behind his painted fragmented moments. Degas' pictorial technique, which corresponds with that of photographs, creates a wedge of distance between a fixed narrative and the audience's conception of one. Benjamin identifies in avant-garde art a wider distance between the works' meaning and viewers' interpretations in comparison to traditional artistic practices.³¹ For Benjamin, this wider distance sanctions in viewers an open and creative approach to interpreting a work's meaning, in which it is possible for multiple readings to arise.³² Degas' ambiguity encourages viewers to engage in an imaginative manner with his paintings, in which they are free to compose any narrative they wish.

²⁹ Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 48-49.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 43-59.

³² Ibid., pp. 54-58.

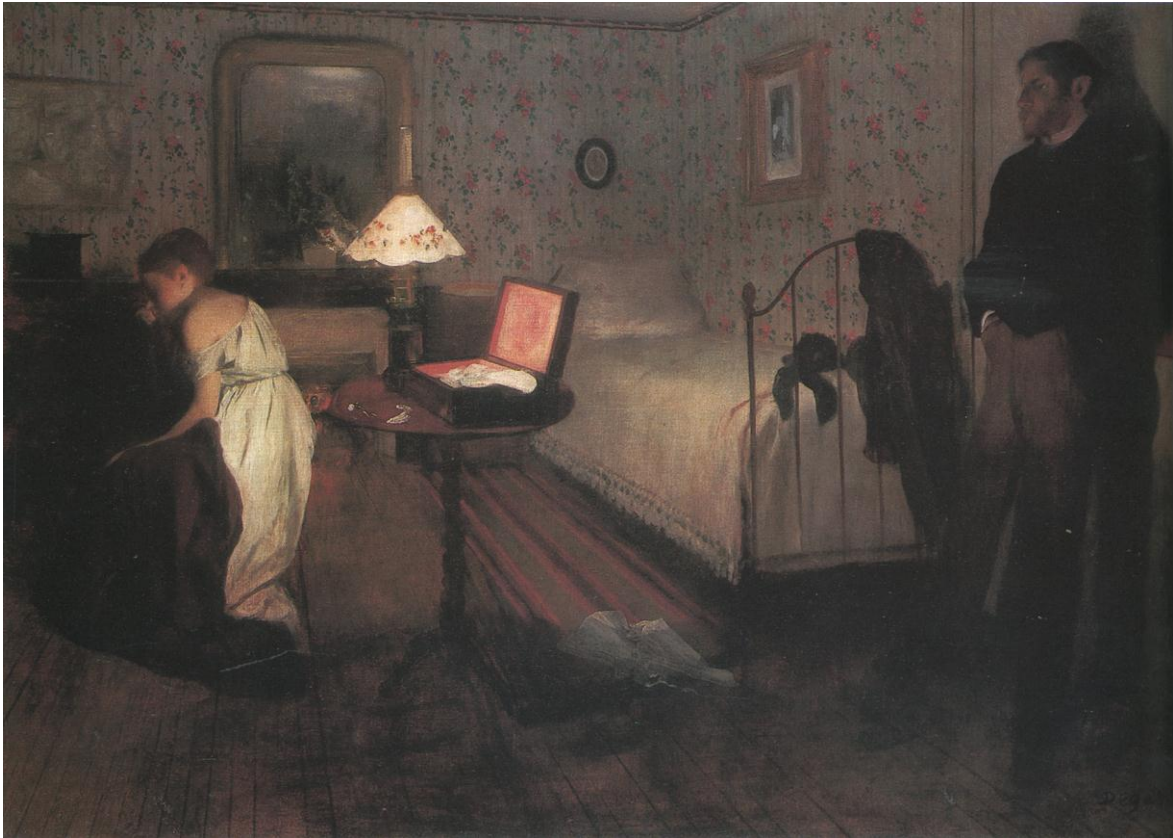


Fig. 8, Degas, *Interior*, 1868-69.

The most ambiguous of Degas' paintings, *Interior* (Fig. 8), presents viewers with just one moment and little indication of the overriding narrative. Through the treatment of the figures' poses and the lighting, Degas created an emotionally charged scene. The painting depicts a bedroom lit only by a lamp sitting on the dresser in the background, casting a low soft light, exaggerating the shadows in the room. A man stands with his back against the door at the foot of the bed to the right edge of the frame. He looks across the room to a woman huddled on a chair with her back to him. The woman appears to be in her undergarments and a discarded corset lies on the floor between the bed and a small round table,³³ with an open sewing box upon it, in the centre of the composition. Tension fills the room, caused by the

³³ The item of clothing that lies on the floor is usually identified as a corset; for reasons unknown, George T.M. Shackelford identifies this item of clothing as a hat. Shackelford's deviation from the general consensus is important to note as a discarded hat carries less sexual insinuation than that of a discarded corset. On closer inspection of *Interior*, the item of clothing appears to me to possess the rigid lines and forms prevalent in a corset. See George T.M. Shackelford and Xavier Rey, *Degas and the Nude*, Thames & Hudson: London, 2011, p. 62.

distance between the two figures and their body language. The dim light also contributes, giving the image a sinister feel.

The lack of a clear narrative encouraged many interpretations of *Interior* to arise, with early critics especially favouring the theme of sexual violence.³⁴ Other interpretations included critics who considered *Interior's* narrative to be sourced from contemporaneous literature,³⁵ and critics who considered the painting to be a representation of domestic and/or gender tensions.³⁶ The painting's title also instigated rigorous commentary as debate ensued about what was the correct title of the work. *Interior* also has an alternative title, *The Rape*, and Degas' contemporaries argued whether this latter title was originally coined by the artist or by critics.³⁷ Paintings' titles play an important part in indicating the context or theme of the work as they can have an influence on how viewers interpret an artwork. Those critics who accepted the title *The Rape* then based their interpretation of the painting on this narrative; the figures' body language and the dim light reinforcing the theme of sexual violence. For example, Camille Mauclair wrote,

- we find ourselves in the terribly heavy silence which followed on the brutal struggle: a silence broken by the sobbing of the semi-nude victim, bowed down by her grief, whilst, with his back to the door, the man, who, now that he has satisfied his lust, is once more correct, but mournfully so, contemplates her despair, through, despite his ennui and remorse, with a glint of madness in his eyes.³⁸

Mauclair assumed that the action that took place before the depicted moment was that of a brutal struggle. The figures' body language, the half undressed state of the woman and the

³⁴ Early writings on *Interior* by George Grappe and Camille Mauclair, present the view that the painting represents the moment after a sexual assault. See Susan Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative: The Problem of Edgar Degas's *Interior*', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 75, No. 4, December 1993, p. 673.

³⁵ See Theodore Reff, 'Tableau de Genre', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 54, No. 3, September 1972, pp. 316-337.

³⁶ See Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative', p. 674, 678-681.

³⁷ Paul Poujaud, a friend of Degas', commented, in a letter to Marcel Guérin, that he never heard Degas refer to *Interior* as *The Rape* (*Le Viol*). Poujaud wrote, 'He never called it *Le Viol* to me. That title is not from his lips. It must have been invented by a literary man, a critic.' See Edgar Germain Hilare Degas, *Edgar Germain Hilare Degas Letters*, Ed. Marcel Guérin, Trans. Marguerite Kay, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1947, p. 235. For a more in-depth discussion on this topic see Reff, p. 316.

³⁸ Camille Mauclair, *Degas*, London and Toronto: William Heinemann Ltd, 1937, p. 14.

discarded corset that lies on the floor seems to support Mauclair's interpretation. These details, however, only implicitly suggest the narrative of rape rather than explicitly confirm this scenario. As Degas gives us no clear indication as to who these two figures are, and their relationship to one another, we could as easily be looking at a scene of the aftermath of an argument between the two, or as Carol Armstrong suggests the failure of a couple to consummate their union.³⁹ *Interior* invites speculation about its narrative and meaning which, as Armstrong and Susan Sidlauskas also acknowledge, raises more questions than it answers.⁴⁰

Sidlauskas assigns *Interior's* ambiguity to a trend in the mid-nineteenth-century when a distinction emerged between 'reading' and 'seeing' artworks.⁴¹ According to Sidlauskas, the unclear ambiguous meaning of *Interior*, which locates the work within the realm of 'seeing', is due to how Degas rendered the scene's details. Sidlauskas argues that *Interior's* details, such as the contents of the sewing box and the reflection in the mirror, are rendered in a vague and imprecise manner, contrasting with traditional genre scenes in which such details are included to aid viewers' understanding of a work's narrative. The soft and hazy appearance of Degas' details does not serve to give viewers greater clarity of *Interior's* narrative; rather they reinforce the painting's obscurity. To illustrate her point Sidlauskas compares Degas' *Interior* to Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode: Shortly After the Marriage* (Fig. 9). Hogarth clearly defined the details of a broken nose on a bust and a snuffed out candle, combined with the newlywed's contrasting body language, to indicate the narrative of an ill-fated union. What Sidlauskas does not explicitly acknowledge is how time is connected to the 'reading' of traditional genre paintings. Hogarth's *Shortly After the Marriage* forms part of a series titled *Marriage à la Mode*, comprising of six paintings in total with *Shortly After the*

³⁹ Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Armstrong, pp. 95-96, Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative', p. 673.

⁴¹ Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative', p. 672.

Marriage being the second work in the series. The visual cues that Sidlauskas points out offer clues to the outcome of future events in the narrative, meaning that even if *Shortly After the Marriage* is viewed on its own, separately from the rest of the series, viewers can still grasp the wider narrative.

Future events cannot be deduced from *Interior* due to, as Sidlauskas claims, the vague representation of the scene's details. Degas, then, denies viewers access to the overall narrative, therefore viewers' attention are focused



Fig. 9, Hogarth, *Marriage à la Mode. Shortly After the Marriage*, 1744.

on the here and now presented in *Interior*, heightening the drama of the scene since their attention cannot drift off to contemplate a future scenario. This is what Sidlauskas means when she claims that viewers 'see' rather than 'read' the scene; viewers concentrate on the lone scene instead of scanning it for visual indicators used to communicate a wider narrative. The audience 'sees' *Interior* in a similar way they 'see' photographs. Viewer perception and evaluation of an image is determined by the representation of a single instant portrayed within the borders of the frame to the exclusion of a wider context. There exists a gulf between photographs and reality just as Degas created this same gulf between his paintings and predetermined meanings. It is this gap which sets the imagination free from both the shackles of reality and prescribed ideologies.

VUILLARD'S 'DECISIVE MOMENT'

Vuillard translated his domestic surroundings into vibrant mixtures of colours, patterns and forms on the canvas surface. A member of the late nineteenth-century avant-garde group, the

Nabis, his early paintings reflect the group's aims for they represent Vuillard's personal sensations and experiences of his surrounding environment. In a similar manner to Degas, Vuillard's paintings also depict fragmented moments of time. Another similarity between the two artists was that Vuillard also experimented with photography. However, whilst Degas' approach produced paintings with ambiguous narratives, Vuillard's frozen moments were motivated by his desire to record the various visual elements, and their relationship to one another, he encountered in the course of daily life. This single moment represents an informal, almost spontaneous, representation of time, when the visual elements seem to naturally align or contrast against each other in a manner that parallels Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'.⁴² Vuillard's interest in the visual relationships of a given moment was expressed in both his paintings and photographs.

According to the Nabis' writings, the group's aims and concerns seem to not be compatible with the practice of photography. Nabis artist Paul Sérusier, in his essay 'The ABC of Painting', proclaimed that painting directly from nature was a mechanical act that excluded the cognitive actions and experiences of the human mind. For Sérusier, images that were formulated in the mind were given priority over objective reality; it was from the mind that painters' should source their inspiration and subject-matter.⁴³ However, the mechanical nature of the camera did not deter Vuillard, and other Nabis artists, from experimenting with the medium. The early years of Vuillard's career corresponded with the rise of snapshot photography. Photographic developments in the 1890's produced cameras capable of capturing instantaneous moments. Vuillard's paintings of the 1890's reflect this new visual experience of time provided by snapshot photography. However Vuillard maintained his

⁴² Cartier-Bresson coined the term 'the decisive moment', which describes the moment when all the aesthetic properties of a photograph (light, composition, subject's motion or expression and so on) align to produce a dynamic and highly expressive image. See Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Mind's Eye: Writings of Photography and Photographers*, Ed. Michael L. Sand, New York: Aperture, 1999, pp. 20-43.

⁴³ Paul Sérusier, 'The ABC of Painting', quoted in Nochlin, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*, p. 184.

Nabis ideologies by representing moments of time that were visually appealing or interesting to him whilst rejecting narrative conventions.

A large body of Vuillard's work features the activities that occurred in his family home where his mother ran a tailoring business. Vuillard froze time at a moment when the aesthetic elements of the scene corresponded or contrasted with one another to create a dynamic mixture of colour, form and pattern. Vuillard's approach was similar to Cartier-Bresson's photographic method and his notion of 'the decisive moment'. Cartier-Bresson coined the term to explain the moment when all the visual elements of the scene align to create an aesthetically interesting or intriguing moment, transcending ordinary reality to express a deeper poetic meaning. John Szarkowski sums up Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' well in a statement that can also apply to Vuillard's early paintings and photographs, he states, 'the thing that happens at the decisive moment is not a dramatic climax, but a visual one. The result is not a story, but a picture.'⁴⁴ It is this emphasis on the visual outcomes generated by time that dominates over narrative and connects the artistic outputs of Cartier-Bresson and Vuillard.

In his journal Vuillard recalled an incident when he experienced a moment comparable to Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'. Vuillard's recollection is about a morning he spent in bed contemplating the various visual relationships that he witnessed in his bedroom. The 'decisive moment' occurred for Vuillard when his mother interrupted the scene by entering the room. Vuillard wrote,

And another thing, in the middle of all these objects, I was astonished to see Mama enter in a blue peignoir with white stripes. To sum up, not one of these inanimate objects had any simple ornamental connection with another, the whole was as disparate as possible. All the same there was a vivid atmosphere, and it gave off an impression that was not at all disagreeable. The arrival of Mama was surprising – a living person. For the painter, the differences of shapes, of forms, were interest

⁴⁴ John Szarkowski, 'A Sense of Time', *American Photographer*, Vol. 10, Iss. 16, 1983, p. 63.

enough.⁴⁵

In Sidlauskas' view the above extract demonstrates how Vuillard reconciled his mother's sudden interruption, incorporating her form into the room's *mise en scène*. Sidlauskas claims that Madame Vuillard then shifted from an independent subject to that of another object that formed part of the bedroom's interior.⁴⁶ Vuillard's account, however, does not seem to suggest such a reconciliation of forms as Sidlauskas claims. Instead Vuillard acknowledged the contrast between the room's inanimate objects and the sudden burst of movement brought about by his mother's abrupt entrance. As Vuillard claimed, the various forms of the bedroom were interesting enough to hold his attention; Madame Vuillard's sudden entrance added an extra dimension and elevated the scene to appeal to a wider audience. This moment in time had the necessary elements to produce a visually dynamic image that informs the 'decisive moment'.

Vuillard's 1893 painting *Interior* (Fig. 10), completed a year before the journal extract, depicts a similar mixture of inanimate and animate forms to the scene described in his journal. The painting shows Madame Vuillard and her daughter Marie in the midst of their sewing tasks when they are suddenly interrupted by the form of Vuillard's friend Ker-Xavier Roussel, who peeks around the door in the centre of the composition. Roussel's sudden entrance is unexpected as his masculine presence contrasts with the female dominated atmosphere of the sewing space. Elizabeth W. Easton considers Roussel's presence an intrusion in the feminine space, indicated by how Roussel's body is partly obstructed by the door.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Edouard Vuillard, *Journal I. Carnet 2*, 26th October 1894, pp. 50-52, quoted in Elizabeth W. Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard*, Washington D.C and Houston: The Smithsonian Institution and The Museum of Fine Arts, 1989, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁶ Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 100.

⁴⁷ Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard*, p. 52.

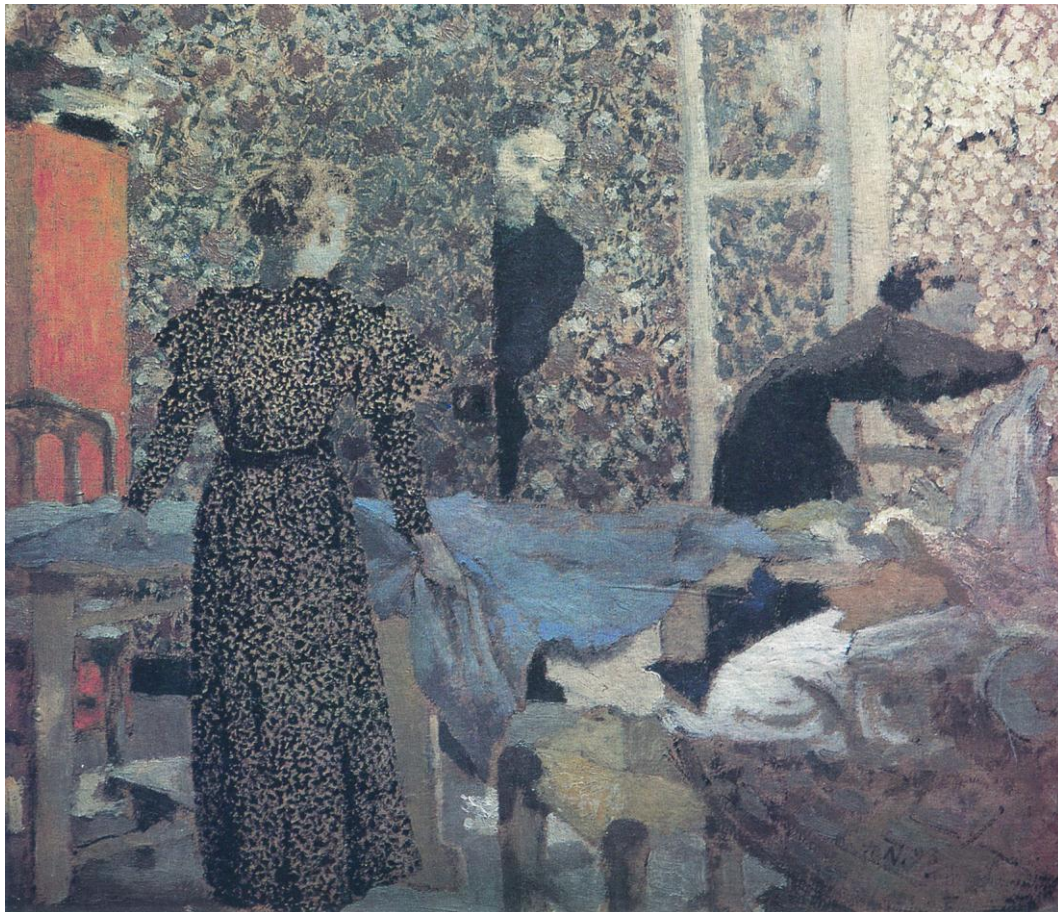


Fig. 10, Vuillard, *Interior*, 1893.

Roussel's abrupt entrance, however, does not intrude, but instead interrupts the relation of forms to one another in a similar way that Madame Vuillard's animate presence interrupted the inanimate forms of Vuillard's room. The representations of Roussel in *Interior* and Madame Vuillard in the journal extract are elements that both contrast with the scenes they interrupt, demanding that viewers' attention navigates away from the abstract realm of aesthetic contemplation to focus, instead, on the constant motion of life. Vuillard could not help, but, to notice and be shocked by his mother's sudden appearance, just as viewers cannot help, but, to return their gaze to Roussel's unexpected arrival, whose white face and navy-clad form stands out against the patterned wallpaper. What makes Roussel's arrival so unexpected was how Vuillard rendered the door Roussel enters through. The door is covered with the same wallpaper that adorns the wall and has no door frame around it to create a distinction between itself and the wall. The only indication of the door's existence is the dark

blob of a door handle located at the point where Roussel's arm meets the door's edge. Without Roussel's action of opening the door and entering the room, the door would remain closed and read as part of the wall surface. The door also appears flat and two dimensional which, combined with the wallpaper, gives the impression that Roussel transitions through the wall reminiscent of a ghost's movements through space; this unexpected sight is what gives the painting its visually tense and confusing nature.

Vuillard's interest in the sudden moment occurred at a time when photography had expanded from the domain of professional photographers to include amateur practitioners. George Eastman's first model of the Kodak camera in 1888 led the way in making photography accessible to the masses. By using the latest advancement in photographic technology, the roll film, Eastman invented a more user-friendly camera with limited settings, along with establishing photographic labs to develop and print roll films.⁴⁸ This development in photography resulted in the emergence of a new photographic genre, one that provided fresh views of life contrasting with the static and staged scenes of portrait and landscape photography. An informal candid approach arose in photography as people began documenting their daily lives. In the final decade of the nineteenth-century the new genre snapshot photography had emerged, establishing itself as a popular pastime.

Vuillard began photographing his family and friends in domestic and social scenes in 1897, using amateur cameras to document the various visual relationships that occurred around him. Eik Kahng and Easton describe Vuillard's photographs as staged and carefully composed scenes that compare to his early paintings and contrast with the instantaneous

⁴⁸ Prior to the establishment of these photographic labs, photographers had developed their own films, or rather photographic plates, at their homes or in their studios.

snapshot photographs of the 1890's.⁴⁹ Yet Kahng and Easton also identify a contradictory element in Vuillard's photography; that of the accidental incidental method they believe he employed following the account of Jacques Salomon, Vuillard's nephew-in-law. However, both Kahng and Easton emphasise the fact that Salomon's account can only verify Vuillard's photographic approach in the 1920's and not for the earlier period of the 1890's. Salomon's account also suggests that by the 1920's Vuillard had acquired another camera, a folding Kodak model,⁵⁰ which possibly replaced the camera it is believed he initially used in the 1890's; the Kodak Bullet camera, a handheld compact roll film camera first released in 1895.⁵¹

In regards to Vuillard's photographic approach, Easton identifies two distinct styles; firstly, the highly co-ordinated compositions of his interior scenes, reflecting the aesthetic style of his earlier paintings, and, secondly, the candid and spontaneous photographs that depict outdoor settings. Kahng, however, seems to suggest that Vuillard's overall photographic practice assumed an accidental nature, as she believes that Vuillard's camera (and the cameras of the 1890's) did not have a viewfinder,⁵² concluding that Vuillard would not have been able to preview his potential photographs. Easton was also of the opinion that Vuillard's camera did not have a viewfinder.⁵³ However, the Kodak Bullet camera does have a

⁴⁹ See Eik Kahng, 'Staged Moments in the Art of Edouard Vuillard', in *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso*, Ed. Dorothy Kosinski, Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 255-258. See also Easton, 'Vuillard's Photography: Artistry and Accident', *Apollo*, Vol. 139, Iss. 388, 1994, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁰ See Jacques Salomon, Annette Valliant and The Lefevre Gallery, *Vuillard et son Kodak*, London: The Lefevre Gallery, 1964, p. 2.

⁵¹ Michel Frizot states that Vuillard used a No. 2 Kodak Bullet Camera, which we see Vuillard holding in some of Bonnard's photographs. See Michel Frizot, 'Pierre's Stupefaction: The Window of Photography', in *Pierre Bonnard The Work of Art: Suspending Time*, Ed. Suzanne P  ge, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2006, p. 262. Salomon described Vuillard's camera as 'an ordinary model, one of the bellows type.' The camera we see Vuillard using in Bonnard's photographs is that of his first camera, as it appears to be a square/rectangular box, comparable to the features of the Kodak Bullet Camera. This camera does not have bellows, so the camera Salomon described must be one Vuillard acquired at a later stage. Cameras with bellows, known as folding cameras, became more prevalent in the 1920's, however, it is difficult to determine when exactly Vuillard obtained this camera as the folding camera first appeared on the market as early as 1897.

⁵² Kahng, pp. 254-255.

⁵³ Easton expressed this opinion in her earlier article, 'Vuillard's Photography: Artistry and Accident', published in 1994. In her latest essay on Vuillard's photographic practice she does not mention the specifications of

viewfinder, albeit a small one which makes composing a potential photograph more difficult than the larger stand cameras with their large glass viewers, but still possible nevertheless. It is not certain the exact model of Vuillard's second camera, however, a viewfinder was a common feature on Kodak's folding cameras, a feature Salomon acknowledged when he stated that Vuillard would photograph a scene, 'oblivious of its viewfinder.'⁵⁴ Therefore, Vuillard's approach was not as accidental as Kahng claims it was, at least not unintentionally.

Vuillard's photographs vary between considered compositions and spontaneous moments, applying both methodologies to interior and exterior scenes. His earlier photographs of interior scenes, however, do tend to demonstrate a considered approach; their compositional style corresponds to his painting method of the 1890's. The photograph *Misia and Thadée Natanson* (Fig. 11) displays a superb visual relationship between the married couple and the



Fig. 11, Vuillard, *Misia and Thadée Natanson*, c.1897-98.

various objects of the room they sit in. Thadée sits in the right foreground looking directly at the camera. His arm and body forms an L shape, replicated in the undulating forms of the cane rocking chair that occupies the mid-ground to the left of Thadée. Misia sits in the background, in a space between Thadée and the rocking chair. Although Misia appears smaller in the frame, at risk of

being dwarfed by the larger subjects of Thadée, the chair and the large mirror that hangs on the wall next to her, her relatively central position makes her the viewer's point of focus. This

Vuillard's cameras. See Easton, 'Edouard Vuillard's Photography and the Limitations of Truth', in *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*, Ed. Elizabeth W. Easton, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 191-196.

⁵⁴ Salomon, p. 2.

photograph evokes the visual arrangement of *Interior*, in which both of the focal points, Roussel and Misia, are surrounded by an array of form and pattern that creates a visually confusing or overwhelming scene where the various forms are made to compete against each other for the viewer's attention.

Kahng and Easton compare Vuillard's photographic technique to Degas', claiming that Vuillard and Degas staged their photographic scenes in a similar manner. Easton does explore further the differences between Degas' and Vuillard's photographic methods, however, her argument mainly centres around the notion of control versus chance, basing her discussion on the differences between the artists' cameras, including Easton's mistaken view that Vuillard's camera did not have a viewfinder, thus leading Easton to conclude that Vuillard's photographic practice had a strong element of chance. This argument of Easton's is, of course, now questionable, considering we now know that Vuillard's first camera had a viewfinder and it is highly likely his second camera also had one. However, the small size of the viewfinders and the restricted camera settings meant that Vuillard did not have the same degree of control over the final photographic image as Degas did. It was possible that Vuillard may have had some input into how the scene appeared in his photographs; however his photographic manner and the resulting photographs still express an aesthetic interest and style clearly distinct from Degas'. Instead, Vuillard's and Degas' photographic approaches have more in common with their individual painting practices than to each other, whilst also reflecting their different approaches to expressing the narrative moment.

Daniel Halévy – son of Degas' close friends, Ludovic and Louise Halévy – in his journal described an evening when, after dinner, Degas took some photographs of those present. Halévy used expressive terms, such as 'dictatorial', 'duty' and 'military obedience', to describe Degas' photographic sessions, equating Degas' method to that of a military

commanding officer.⁵⁵ Easton is then right to conclude that Degas' photographic practice was a highly controlled affair, especially when compared with Vuillard's photographic practice. It remains uncertain how much control Vuillard asserted over the outcome of his earlier photographs taken with his Kodak Bullet camera. However, we are made aware of Vuillard's photographic approach in the 1920's, with his second camera, from Salomon's written account. Salomon stated,

Sometimes, during a conversation, Vuillard would go to get it [his camera] and resting it on some furniture or even the back of a chair, oblivious of its view finder, would point the lens in the direction of the image he wished to record: he would then give a brief warning, "Hold it please" and we could hear the clic...clac of the time exposure. The camera was then returned to its place, and Vuillard walked back to his seat.⁵⁶

This account informs us that Vuillard's photographic practice, at this point in time, was an organic process, for it seems that Vuillard selected a moment from the course of daily life to photograph instead of staging or manipulating the scene. Vuillard seemed to wait for the right moment to unfold and reveal itself before he picked up the camera, demonstrating an approach that has more in common with Cartier-Bresson's photographic practice than that of Degas' highly manipulated photographic sessions. Salomon's account also demonstrates how, unlike Degas, Vuillard did not set up a specific time and place to photograph his family and friends but photographed when the mood struck him.⁵⁷ The various domestic scenarios and lighting situations of his earlier photographs suggest that Vuillard's earlier photographic experiments were also located in the realm of daily life. Vuillard's photographic technique, combined with his use of amateur cameras, meant that, overall, Vuillard's photographs were

⁵⁵ Daniel Halévy in his journal, 29th December 1895, quoted in Malcolm Daniel, 'The Atmosphere of Lamps or Moonlight', in *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, Ed. Malcolm Daniel, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶ Salomon, p. 2.

⁵⁷ I discuss in further depth Degas' allocation of time in relation to his photographic sessions in the third chapter. See pp. 99-100. This discussion is followed by an investigation into Bonnard's photographic practice, which also contrasts with Degas' methodology, and is comparable to Vuillard's and Cartier-Bresson's photographic approaches. See pp. 107-112.

not the result of an overtly co-ordinated or controlled photographic process.⁵⁸ Instead, Vuillard's photographic practice was motivated by his desire to capture and record his personal visual experiences of his domestic life. Therefore, in terms of narrative style, Vuillard's early photographs and their dominant formalist focus contrasts with the ambiguous narrative style expressed in Degas' photographs.

The moody atmosphere that Degas created in his photographs suggests an underlying narrative, Halévy's journal account supports this notion as Degas' strict demeanour suggests he was working with a specific intention in mind. Degas' photographs assume a similar appearance to the theatre stage, where the use of high contrast light emphasises the actors'



Fig. 12, Degas, *Daniel Halvéy*, 1895.

movements and positions, as well as serving to heighten the scene's dramatic atmosphere. For example, in the photograph *Daniel Halévy* (Fig. 12) Degas photographed Halévy seated in a chair with only one light source coming from a lamp placed on a table to Halévy's left, slightly behind where he sat. The rest of the room is shrouded in darkness, causing the light from the single lamp to cast a strong spot-like effect on the left side of Halévy's face.

Degas employed light in an expressive manner and his photographs are often associated with the Symbolist movement due to their evocative and moody nature.⁵⁹ His photographs also express Degas' recurring interest in dramatic lighting, harking back to the mid 1860's to such paintings as *Interior*; the dim lamp light depicted in the painting contributing to the painting's tense atmosphere. Degas used light not to reveal,

⁵⁸ Degas wielded more control over the final outcome of his photographs, in part due to the wider range of settings his camera had. It is not certain what camera model Degas owned, however, we do know that he was able to control the length of exposure time when he took his photographs and also the camera's focus. I discuss in more detail Degas' camera and the model he possibly used in the third chapter of this thesis. See p. 98.

⁵⁹ See Eugenia Parry, 'Degas's Photographic Theater', in *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, pp. 67-70, and Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard*, p. 111.

but to suggest that something deeper lies beneath the surface of ordinary visual experience. As with the fragmented moment exhibited in *Interior*, his moody photographs also hint at a narrative without explicitly informing viewers what this narrative actually is.⁶⁰

Vuillard's photographs, especially his earlier domestic scenes, bypass any form of narrative expression to concentrate, instead, on expressing Vuillard's personal visual experiences of his home and other domestic environments. Vuillard did not use elaborate lighting setups, in the manner of Degas, but utilised whatever available light was present to express an accurate representation of his surrounding environment and his visual experience. Light was not manipulated to emphasis a certain mood or to highlight one feature of the scene over another. As mood often serves to set the emotional tone of the image it is also a device used to help

express a work's narrative. Vuillard focused on the various visual relationships that occurred at the scene, prioritising these over creating a particular emotional context. Equal priority is, therefore, given to all the elements within Vuillard's photographs, whether they are people or objects. His photograph *Romain Coolus in the Natanson's Country House* (Fig. 13) depicts Coolus seated reading at a desk



Fig. 13, Vuillard, *Romain Coolus in the Natanson's Country House*, c.1899.

situated next to a fireplace. Sunlight beams in from the left of the frame, washing out and obliterating details of the objects sitting on the desk and the left side of Coolus' face. Since the sunlight does not reach far enough into the room, the items atop the fireplace mantel are clearly defined, contrasting with the objects on the desk. The photograph does not

⁶⁰ I revisit Degas' photographic narrative moments, and compare them to Academic painting in the third chapter of this thesis. See pp. 100-101.

appear staged; instead Vuillard seemed to capture a moment that naturally occurred. This is because Coolus does not appear to assume a pose but remains absorbed in his reading, as well as Vuillard's use of natural light, which threatens to wash out the scene.

Vuillard's early photographic efforts were an extension of his painting practice; he used both mediums to express his personal visual experiences of his surrounding domestic environment. These aesthetic concerns dominated over the expression of narrative, meaning that Vuillard's early paintings moved further away from the traditional conventions of Academic painting and were a step in the direction towards the development of the purely aesthetic and formal concerns of twentieth-century modernism.

SICKERT'S FLEXIBLE NARRATIVES

Sometimes it appeared as if life for Sickert was one continuous theatre production, as the artist never fully let go of his former profession as an actor.⁶¹ Sickert was notorious for experimenting with his identity, often assuming different characters as he went about his daily life. Sickert's contemporary, art critic Clive Bell, compared the artist's behaviour to that of a chameleon. Bell stated,

He was a *poseur* by choice; he was naughty by nature and he never ceased to be an actor. In order not to be disconcerted and misled one had to know what part at any given moment he had cast himself for. One day he would be John Bull and the next Voltaire; occasionally he was the Archbishop of Canterbury and quite often the Pope.⁶²

The creative liberty that Sickert took with his own identity was reflected in his paintings, where creative liberties were taken with the works' identities; their narratives. Sickert, in a similar manner to Degas, operated around the perimeters of narrative, rejecting the fixed

⁶¹ As a young man, before he began his art education and career, Sickert was an actor who travelled England with several well-known theatre companies. He did this from 1879 until he started his formal art training in 1881.

⁶² Clive Bell, 'Sickert', *The Cornhill Magazine*, No. 161, January 1944, p. 23.

meanings that expressed a specific ideology to instead explore the imaginative possibilities that an isolated moment of a narrative offered. These imaginative possibilities included Sickert's desire to represent his imaginative responses to life in a trio of self-portraits he painted during 1927 to 1929.

For these self-portraits, Sickert painted from photographs specifically taken to aid him in the creation of these paintings. The photographs' preservation of action and narrative at a single moment permitted Sickert to render his own form in a naturalistic and candid manner within his self-portraits. The fragmented moment presented in photographs, and in Degas' paintings, also seemed to serve as inspiration for Sickert; his paintings also assume an ambiguous quality, especially in terms of narrative and meaning. However, the titles of Sickert's self-portraits, that reference biblical narratives, provide a framework which aid viewers' interpretations. Sickert's self-portraits then assume the form of visual metaphors since Sickert aligns narrative episodes in the Bible to his personal experiences. The disparity between the ambiguous fragmented moments presented in his paintings and the biblical title, means that Sickert encourages viewers to respond imaginatively to his self-portraits.

Virginia Woolf recognised in Sickert's portraiture an imaginative quality in tune with fiction. In her publication, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, Woolf wrote, 'But to me Sickert always seems more of a novelist than a biographer, said the other. He likes to set his characters in motion, to watch them in action.'⁶³ However, it becomes clear with further reading of Woolf's critique that the narrative Sickert provided was a loose one that allowed Woolf to produce an imaginative response. Continuing her analysis, Woolf claimed that, 'The figures are motionless, of course, but each has been seized in a moment of crisis; it is difficult to look at them and not to invent a plot, to hear what they are saying.'⁶⁴ When discussing Sickert's

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1934, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

painting *Ennui* (Fig. 14), Woolf invented a narrative in which she cast the husband and wife protagonists as publicans, providing details that describe the pub's atmosphere beyond the single moment depicted in the painting. 'Even now somebody is tapping his glass impatiently on the bar counter.' Woolf wrote, 'She will have to bestir herself; to pull her heavy, indolent body together and go and serve him. The grimness of that situation lies in the fact that there is no crisis; dull minutes are mounting, old matches are accumulating and dirty glasses and dead cigars; still they must go, up they must get.'⁶⁵

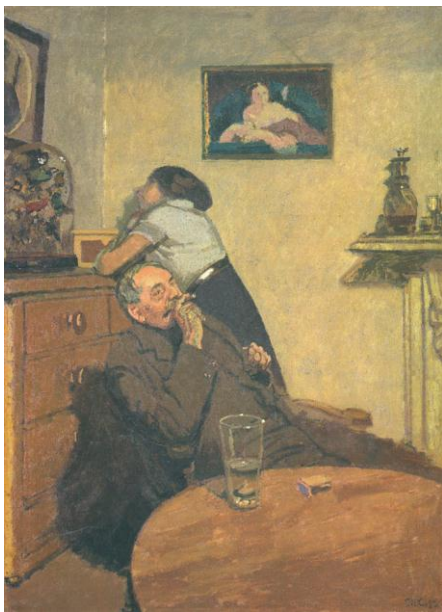


Fig. 14, Sickert, *Ennui*, c.1914.

painting centred round the theme that Sickert provided. Therefore viewers' interpretations and imaginative responses to *Ennui* are influenced by Sickert's cues; however there is still room for viewers to assert their individual responses, demonstrated by Woolf with her invention of the pub scenario.

Narratives and their moral messages were a factor of the artistic process that Sickert did not seek to extol. Instead, Sickert emphasised formal elements such as the rhythm of lines and compositional flow. Sickert's views were rooted in the grounds of aestheticism, rather than

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

Woolf's response to *Ennui* echoes critics' reaction to Degas' *Interior*. The single moment depicted in both paintings represents only a fragment of the overall narrative, making these paintings open to interpretation, allowing critics to respond imaginatively to them. However, Sickert's paintings are less ambiguous than Degas' since he provides loose themes, such as *Ennui*'s theme of boredom, reflected in the title and the woman's body language. Woolf's interpretation of this

meaning. He stated that, 'Pleasure and pleasure alone is the proper purpose of art.'⁶⁶ In an act similar to his various adoptions of different personas, Sickert experimented with the narratives and meanings of his paintings by changing their titles. Sickert's painting of 1908-09 is known by the two titles that he gave them, *What Shall We Do for the Rent?* and *The Camden Town Murder* (Fig. 15).⁶⁷ The



Fig. 15, Sickert, *What Shall We Do For the Rent?/ The Camden Town Murder*, c.1908.

The painting shows a man sitting hunched forward on a bed, next to him lays a naked woman with her head turned away from the viewer. Sickert's two titles present two different narrative scenarios that guide viewers on how to interpret the scene. The

single moment, in which wider details of the setting are cropped out, makes the painting open to accommodating both scenarios; either representing the aftermath of a murder or the depiction of a poverty-stricken couple. Meaning, in Sickert's paintings, was not a concrete feature but rather an element that was flexible to change. David Peters Corbett credits Sickert's multiple titles to an interest in such concepts as misrecognition and hidden pretences,⁶⁸ notions consistent with Sickert's personal behaviour.

Sickert's use of multiple titles could also have been commenting on the traditional modes of narrative representation and their accompanying fixed meanings. *What Shall We Do for the Rent?/The Camden Town Murder*, along with *Summer in Naples/Dawn, Camden Town*, was painted during the phase in Sickert's career known as the Camden Town period, spanning the first decade of the twentieth-century. During this time, Sickert revolted against the

⁶⁶ Walter Sickert, 'Italia! Italia!' *Fortnightly Review*, February 1930, quoted in Walter Sickert, *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art*, Ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 598.

⁶⁷ For a further discussion on Sickert's interest in identity, in both individuals and his paintings, see David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914*, University Park, Pennsylvania and Manchester: The Pennsylvania State University and Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 200-213.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 203-204.

sensibilities of the English art scene by residing in London's unfashionable area of Camden Town, producing paintings depicting nude women and unsavoury figures in the derelict surroundings of his apartment. The lack of certainty, in regards to meaning, could have formed part of Sickert's rebellion against the conservative conventions of English society, which Sickert blamed for inhibiting the development of avant-gardism in English art. In his review on the New English Art Club's summer exhibition in 1910, Sickert wrote,

The pictures at the New English Art Club are often described as impressionist, and their painters called impressionist. This always surprises and amuses French visitors to England. A painter is guided and pushed by his surroundings very much as an actor is, and the atmosphere of English society acting on a gifted group of painters, who had learned what they knew either in Paris, or from Paris, has provided a school with aims and qualities altogether different from those of the impressionists.⁶⁹

Sickert was inspired by the Impressionists, especially moved by the paintings' of Degas. There could perhaps be a direct connection between those paintings of Sickert's, with their multiple titles, and Degas' *Interior*. Sickert was familiar with *Interior*, having viewed it on one of his visits to Degas' studio, and was also well aware of the critical debate surrounding the painting on the nature of its narrative. *Interior* did not leave Degas' studio until 1906 and it was around this time that debate over the painting's meaning and title ensued. The rape narrative, and its alternative title of *The Rape*, was rejected by Sickert who suggested the painting simply conveyed a family drama.⁷⁰ Sickert's paintings with multiple titles were painted two to three years after *Interior's* public debut and they seem to challenge the influence titles have over viewers' interpretations. By giving his work multiple titles, Sickert demonstrates that the scenes represented in his paintings are not tied down to fixed narrative

⁶⁹ Sickert, 'The New English and After', *The New Age*, 2nd June 1910, quoted in Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 241.

⁷⁰ See Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative', p. 679.

structures but are open to accommodate various narrative possibilities; an act that undermines the title's power in laying the narrative foundations for the represented moment.

Sickert's relationship with Degas, and exposure to the older artist's work, had a significant impact on his own painting career. They first met in 1893 at Degas' studio when Sickert was sent to Paris by his painting teacher, James Abbott McNeill Whistler.⁷¹ Sickert and Degas were reacquainted in the summer of 1885, both holidaying in the French town of Dieppe. Their burgeoning friendship inspired a shift in Sickert's aesthetic style; moving away from a style similar to Whistler's to instead adopt a pictorial style closer to Degas'.⁷² It was also during this summer that Degas hired a struggling photographer, Walter Barnes, to photograph him and his social circle. Sickert features in one of these photographs, *The Halévy Family and Their Friends* (1885). In another of Barnes' photographs, *The Apotheosis of Degas* (1885),⁷³ Degas had played a major role in the compositional layout of the photograph, asserting a similar directorial manner that would define his own photographic practice of the 1890's. It was, then, likely that Degas also exhibited a similar degree of control in the posing of *The Halévy Family and Their Friends*.⁷⁴ If this was the case Sickert would have witnessed firsthand how Degas asserted his artistic will during the photographic process. Sickert remained in contact with Degas, meeting up with him during his frequent visits to Paris where Sickert became aware of Degas' photographic experiments and the visual connections between Degas' photographs and his paintings.⁷⁵ Degas proved that photography offered the

⁷¹ Whistler had sent Sickert to Paris to deliver his painting *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* to the 1893 Salon. Whistler had also given Sickert two letters of introduction to Manet and Degas. Due to illness, Manet could not meet Sickert; however he still viewed Manet's work at the artist's studio.

⁷² Sickert wrote of his friendship with Degas, and the advice the older artist imparted to him, in the article, 'Degas', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 31, No. 176, November 1917, pp. 183-187, 190-191.

⁷³ I discuss this photograph in more detail in the third chapter, see pp. 101-102.

⁷⁴ Parry also thinks it was possible that Degas was involved in directing the photograph. See Parry, pp. 61-62. Anna Gruetzner Robins also discusses Degas' role in directing Barnes' photographs, highlighting the photograph, *Six Friends at Dieppe*, taken during that same summer, and including Sickert amongst the group of six friends. See Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Degas and Sickert: Notes on their Friendship', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1020, Special Issue on Degas, March 1988, pp.198, 210-211, 225-229.

⁷⁵ Sickert mentioned that Degas took photographs in a letter to *The Times*, dated 15th August 1929. See Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 591.

potential to act as another medium for artistic expression without inhibiting one's personal creative vision; contrasting with critical views on photography's role in the creative process.

Sickert sporadically painted from photographs throughout his career; however, it was during the later stages (from the 1920's onwards) that he began to paint more frequently from photographs, corresponding with his changing attitude towards painters using photographs as study aids. During the 1890's Sickert expressed his reservations on the topic of painters employing photographs as study aids. An editorial that featured in *Studio Magazine* in July 1893, included Sickert's opinion on painting from photographs, along with other informed individuals, under the heading, 'Is the Camera a Friend or Foe of Art?' Sickert was of the opinion that photography threatened artists' observational skills and their ability to produce expressive works.⁷⁶ Sickert maintained a cautious view to artists' use of photographs as study aids throughout the first two decades of the twentieth-century, although he did consider they could be of some help to draughtsmen.⁷⁷ Photography was also beneficial, in Sickert's opinion, for making mediocre painters redundant;⁷⁸ who he classed as merely copying directly from nature without expressing any personal or imaginative artistic concerns. By the late 1920's Sickert's opinion of photography's value to painters had changed dramatically; extolling the medium's importance to painting, as well as other art mediums. 'A photograph is the most precious document obtainable by a sculptor, a painter, or a draughtsman', Sickert stated in 1929, 'To forbid the artist the use of available documents of which the photograph is the most valuable, is to deny to a historian the study of contemporary shorthand reports.'⁷⁹

This statement formed part of a letter to *The Times* in defence of artists using photographs as study aids, proving that this was still a contentious issue despite photography being nearly a

⁷⁶ 'Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?', *Studio Magazine*, July 1893, in Ibid., p. 97.

⁷⁷ Sickert, 'The Old Ladies of Etching-Needle Street', *English Review*, January 1912, in Ibid., p. 288.

⁷⁸ Sickert, 'Van Beers And Menpes', *The Speaker*, 22nd May 1897, in Ibid., p. 172.

⁷⁹ Sickert, 'The Haig Statue', *The Times*, 15th August 1929, in Ibid., p. 591

century old. Photography was still seen as a threat to an artist's individual creative vision. This was a sentiment that Sickert shared in his younger years, often criticising art critics for not doing their 'obvious duty' of clearly identifying those paintings or drawings created with the aid of photographic studies.⁸⁰ In his later years, Sickert used a variety of photographic sources, predominately newspaper photographs and snapshots taken by his wife, Thérèse Lessore,⁸¹ to aid his paintings. Sometimes a particular photograph viewed in a newspaper would capture Sickert's eye and inspire him to recreate the scene in paint.⁸² On other occasions photographs were specifically created to help Sickert realise a specific intention, such of those used for the creation of his three self-portraits mentioned at the beginning of this discussion.

These self-portraits represent Sickert's imaginative responses to events in his life. Photographic aids were an important factor in the realisation of the three self-portraits, making it easier for Sickert to render his own form immersed in action. For Sickert, using photographs as study aids was more convenient and easier than the sketching process. As Sickert stated, 'With regard to drawing from nature, why should we go out and walk for miles carrying our materials when we can get all we want from photographs which preserve the movement of subjects[?]'⁸³

⁸⁰ See Sickert, 'Correspondence', *The Whirlwind*, 23rd August 1890, in Ibid., p. 80, and Sickert, 'Drawing and Photography', *National Observer*, 2nd May 1891, in Ibid., p. 84.

⁸¹ Sickert had been married twice before his marriage to Lessore in June of 1926. His first wife was Ellen Cobden, daughter of the radical politician Richard Cobden, whom Sickert married in June of 1885 and divorced in May of 1899. Sickert married his second wife, Christine Drummond Angus, in 1911 and they remained married until her death from tuberculosis in October of 1920. Sickert remained with Lessore until his death in 1942.

⁸² In the 1930's a number of Sickert's paintings were painted from newspaper photographs. *King George V and his Racing Manager: A Conservation Piece at Aintree* (c.1929-30) and *HM King. Edward VIII* (1936) are a couple of examples of Sickert's paintings that were inspired by photographs he viewed in newspapers. I discuss these two paintings and Sickert's use of newspaper photographs as study aids in the second chapter of this thesis, see pp. 79-90.

⁸³ Sickert, 'Squaring up a Drawing', the second lecture given in a series of lectures at the Margate School of Art, 2nd November 1934, quoted in Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 639. The question mark is part of the quote in the source material.

Depicting the right moment was an important factor for Sickert in the creation of his three self-portraits. These paintings were created after Sickert had finished recuperating from a

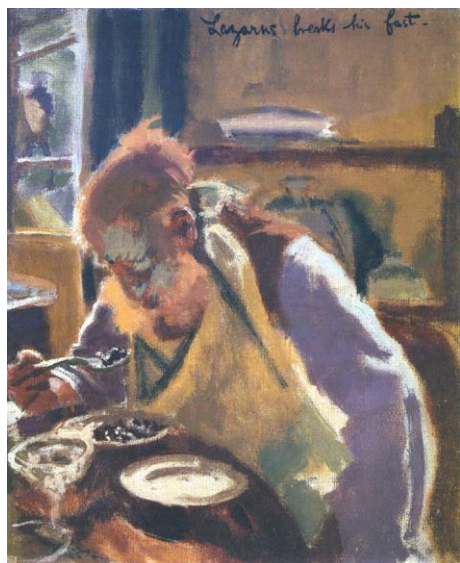


Fig. 16, Sickert, *Lazarus Breaks His Fast*, c.1927.

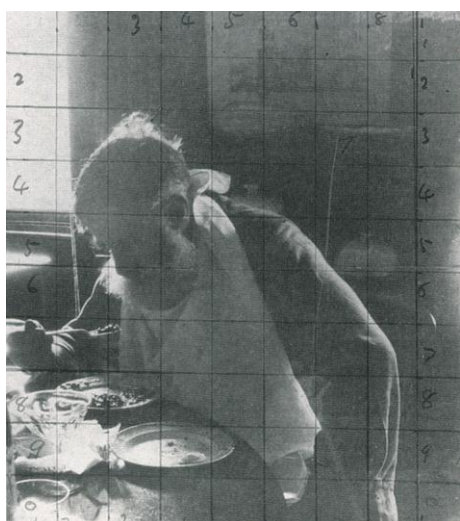


Fig. 17, Lessore, *Man with Beard*, 1927.

mysterious illness that had plagued him since the summer of 1926, not long after his marriage to Lessore. The first painting in the series, *Lazarus Breaks His Fast* (Fig. 16), represents Sickert's return to health as he compares his situation to the Bible's narrative of Lazarus, brought back from the dead. Painting directly from a photograph taken by Lessore (Fig. 17), Sickert painted a self-portrait of him eating. His use of a photographic study meant that he could represent himself in mid-motion much easier than if he had sketched himself using a mirror. The act of eating is highlighted serving to emphasise the return of Sickert's appetite in terms of both health and artistic concerns. Wendy Baron comments, 'Because the painter does not look out of the picture, his concentration upon eating from the plate before him is not disturbed; thus the impact of this image of renewed appetite for life is enhanced.'⁸⁴

The second self-portrait, *The Servant of Abraham* (1929), was also painted from a snapshot taken by Lessore, and again the painting's composition remains faithful to the photograph. The presence of a drawn grid on both the photographic study aids for *Lazarus Breaks His Fast* and *The Servant of Abraham* show the methodology Sickert used in creating the

⁸⁴ Wendy Baron, *Sickert Paintings*, Eds. Wendy Baron and Richard Shone, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 288.

compositional structures of his two self-portraits. Lessore often took photographs specifically for Sickert to use as aids for his paintings, working together as a team in order for Sickert to achieve his artistic goals.

Unlike the other two self-portraits, *The Raising of Lazarus* (Fig. 19) was painted from a photograph taken by a professional photographer (Fig. 18), not Lessore. The reason for this was probably due to the complicated nature of the composition, lighting and poses that the final painting and the photograph both exhibit. Sickert sourced this complicated arrangement from an event in his life; the delivery of a life-sized figurine (used as a study aid by painters, this particular one had apparently belonged to Hogarth) to Sickert's Highbury studio in London. The odd sight of the figurine's delivery amused Sickert and he imagined the scene as a *tableaux vivant* expressing the biblical narrative of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, the



Fig. 18, unknown, untitled, c.1929.

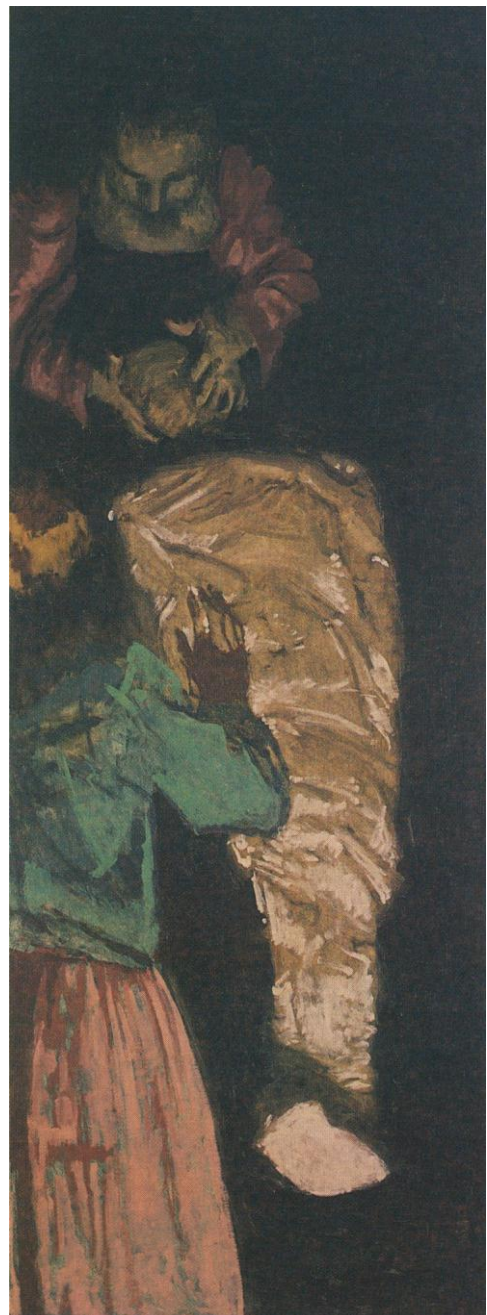


Fig. 19, Sickert, *The Raising of Lazarus*, c.1929.

life-sized figurine representing Lazarus. Inspired to represent his imaginative response in a painting, Sickert hired a professional photographer to photograph the restaged scene of the figurine's delivery as choreographed by Sickert. In the photograph Sickert cast himself in the role of Jesus as he crouches on top of a step ladder, situated at the top of the composition. His friend, Cicely Hey, stands in front of the figurine in the role of one of Lazarus' sisters.

As with the previous two self-portraits, Sickert closely translates the photograph's imagery into the painting. Photography's ability to halt time and render particular moments of action was invaluable to Sickert's self-portraits, making it easier for Sickert to depict himself in active poses. Contrasting with the conventions general to religious painting, Sickert's Jesus is represented in an active role, his hands clutching the figurine's/Lazarus' head.⁸⁵ This portrayal was perhaps more faithful to the event of the figurine's delivery than that of the biblical narrative. Sickert's active participation in his role of Jesus also emphasises the biblical narrative's notion of renewal, in which Jesus' act of bringing Lazarus back to life can be compared to the fresh approach Sickert exhibited in his artistic output after his illness, a new direction that included Sickert's increased usage of photographic studies.

Baron considers *The Raising of Lazarus* to be the most imaginative out of Sickert's three self-portraits, stating, 'in *The Raising of Lazarus* the conceptual leap from straight portraiture towards the realm of imaginative history painting was both more immediate and more precipitate.'⁸⁶ Indeed, *The Raising of Lazarus* is certainly the most elaborate in terms of the painting's construction and the imaginative force that motivated Sickert. This imaginative response, initially experienced by Sickert, is then shared with his viewers as the painting presents a certain ambiguity. Sickert, again, depicts the ambiguous single moment that featured in his earlier Camden Town paintings, Degas' paintings and photography.

⁸⁵ See Amy Oates, 'The Raising of Lazarus: Caravaggio and John 11', *Interpretation*, Vol. 61, No. 4, October 2007, for more information on how Jesus is portrayed in paintings depicting the Lazarus theme.

⁸⁶ Baron, *Sickert Paintings*, p. 294.

However *The Raising of Lazarus* further enhances this notion of ambiguity, due to how Sickert stripped the *mise en scène* of any telling details that may hint to an underlying narrative. The only detail that relates to the Lazarus narrative is the shrouding wrapped around the figurine, which was applied by an undertaker. The rest of the scene relates little to the Lazarus narrative as Sickert and Hey wear contemporary clothes and are set against a dark background, the strong directional light casting the rest of the scene into darkness. Therefore the lack of details in *The Raising of Lazarus* works with the painting's frozen and isolated moment of time, separated from previous and future events, to create a certain ambiguity in relation to the painting's narrative and overall meaning. Aside from the figurine's shrouding, the only clue we have of *The Raising of Lazarus*' connection to the biblical narrative is the painting's title, a factor that also applies to Sickert's other two self-portraits. As with his Camden Town paintings, Sickert emphasises the role of the title in communicating a work's narrative, however instead of challenging the title's influence he exploits its power in order to express his imaginative responses, providing a framework for viewers' to understand his paintings. Yet, the exclusion of details in *The Raising of Lazarus*, as well as *The Servant of Abraham*, and the figures' contemporaneous dress, along with the contemporary setting of *Lazarus Breaks His Fast*, distance Sickert's paintings from the biblical narratives. Sickert's titles compel viewers to engage their imaginative faculties when relating the ambiguous moments of his self portraits to that of their biblical namesakes; an act that mimics Sickert's initial response to those events in his life.

CONCLUSION

In a different manner from each other, Degas, Vuillard and Sickert challenged the role of narrative in Academic painting and its expression of a specific meaning or ideology. Whether directly or indirectly, photography played an important part in how narrative was, or was not, represented in these artists' works. Their depiction of a single instant of time aligns their

paintings with a photographic, rather than literary, expression of time, allowing their works to express their imaginative and aesthetic concerns, whilst also encouraging a wider scope of imaginative response within viewers.

Degas' use of expressive tone and props worked together to suggest the presence of an underlying narrative. However, his emphasis on the single moment, and its isolation from the literary plotline, means that viewers are denied a wider context and a fixed narrative. Degas created a greater distance between his intention and viewers' understanding, a similar distance that exists in photography; this distance provides fertile ground for multiple and imaginative interpretations to arise, challenging the intended singular meanings of traditional genre paintings.

New developments in photography, and the new views of life that accompanied these developments, proved fruitful for Vuillard in his visual investigation of modern life. Narrative took a backseat as Vuillard became interested in the various visual relationships that could spontaneously form at any given moment. Exploring these visual relationships in painting and photography, Vuillard's artistic output expresses his personal experiences of life that reflects the avant-garde's growing concern with representing modern life over traditional Academic subject matter.

Sickert's efforts were comparable to both Degas' and Vuillard's, his paintings depicting a fragment of a narrative, not based on an ideology, but, instead, one that expressed his personal response to life. Photographs were utilised in a more direct manner by Sickert who translated their compositions faithfully into his paintings. It was with the help of photographic studies that allowed Sickert to depict frozen moments of action which contributed to the scene's ambiguous settings, the visual nature of these paintings and their

corresponding titles encouraging viewers to make the same imaginative leap that Sickert originally did.

What links Degas', Vuillard's and Sickert's artwork is their emphasis on personal reactions; whether of their own or that of viewers'. Their focus on individual reactions and interpretations means that these artists shifted away from the formulaic style of conventional Academic painting. This formula began to break down in the nineteenth-century, and continued to do so into the twentieth-century, as artists challenged painting's role and its relationship to viewers' experiences. Photography formed part of this fertile atmosphere, providing an expression of time never seen before, serving as an example and inspiration for those artists astute enough to recognise its artistic value and potential.

ALTERNATIVE REALITIES: REPRESENTING PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

Photography's emergence during the nineteenth-century challenged painting's role in the act of remembrance. It was generally believed that photographs portrayed a more accurate and objective account of the past than those produced by the subjective strokes of the painter's brush. This was due to photography's mechanical nature and the direct connection the medium has to the subject's existence at a given moment in time. Photography's potential for preserving factual information of the world, and aiding collective memory, was acknowledged by Baudelaire in his review of the 1859 Salon exhibition. He wrote, 'Let it [photography] rescue from oblivion those tumbling ruins, those books, prints and manuscripts which time is devouring, precious things whose form is dissolving and which demand a place in the archives of our memory – it will be thanked and applauded.'⁸⁷

Photography's growth made the visual act of remembrance accessible to a wider range of people, thereby democratising memory. Prior to photography's invention, the costly exercise of portrait painting excluded the lower socio-economic strata from possessing a visual account of their ancestors. Photography's aptitude at reproduction meant the burgeoning medium was faster and more affordable than painting. Photographic developments throughout the nineteenth-century, ranging from the mid-century's *carte de visite* (Fig. 20)⁸⁸ to the amateur Kodak camera of the late 1880's, created a wider market appeal. The invention, and subsequent developments, of the amateur Kodak camera introduced a new genre within photography: that of the candid snapshot. These cameras were predominately used in the private domestic sphere to capture important and spontaneous moments of family life. Snapshot photographs, displayed in albums, became facilitators of memory by providing viewers with a window to a past deemed more accurate than scenes viewed within paintings.

⁸⁷ Baudelaire, p. 154.

⁸⁸ The *carte de visite* had eight different photographs on the same negative plate, which produced a series of small photographic images when printed. People would cut up the images and trade them for other people's *cartes de visites*. See Newhall, *The History of Photography*, pp. 64-66.

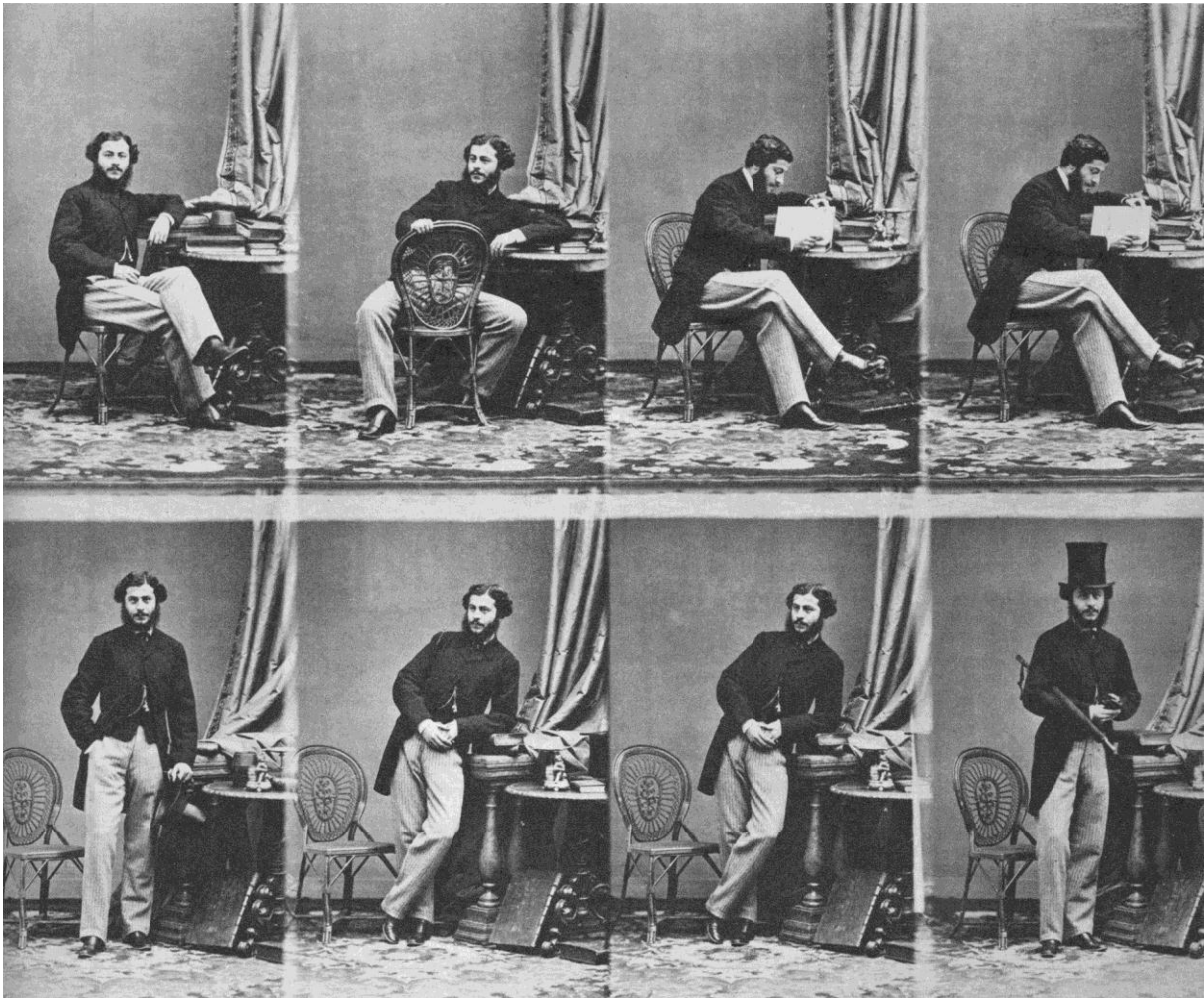


Fig. 20, Disdéri, uncut print from a carte-de-visite negative, c.1860

Photography's contribution to remembrance was expanded on during the twentieth-century with the development of photojournalism. This new photographic genre applied snapshot photography's candid and un-posed approach to the public domain. Public figures, such as royalty, government officials and celebrities, could be photographed unwittingly as they went about their daily lives. Photojournalism's aesthetic tone differs considerably from the obviously staged scenes of conventional portraiture, or public sculptures, which had traditionally been the main signifiers for the remembrance of public figures. As photojournalism provided different insights into the lives and characters of well-known figures, an alternative visual language emerged to contribute to public memory. This alternative viewpoint took the control of one's public image away from the represented individual, placing it firmly in the hands of the photojournalist. Because of this, press

photographs are then capable of representing, somewhat, more honest renditions of public figures.⁸⁹

Despite photography's perceived veracity, questions began to arise over photography's role as the custodian of memories. Marcel Proust's homage to memory, his seven novel series, *In Search of Lost Time*, places emphasis on such sensory experiences as taste and sound, which stirs the narrator's memory, rather than sight.⁹⁰ In the second volume, *Within a Budding Grove*, Proust even questioned photography's ability to portray accurate representations of those photographed.⁹¹ Within photographic discourse, Roland Barthes addressed the notion of photography's fraudulence by noting the differences that existed between the contrived image of his photographed self and the actuality of his real self. Barthes wrote, "myself" never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and "myself" which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, "myself" doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar."⁹²

It is perhaps this discrepancy, between photography and reality, which may have attracted some painters to explore photography's relationship to memory. Vuillard looked back to the

⁸⁹ Of course press photographs, along with other photographic genres, are just as susceptible to manipulation by photographers, who can photograph scenes that are either fictional or exaggerate actual events. I discuss this aspect of photography in the first chapter in regards to Robert Doisneau's iconic photograph *Kiss at Hotel D'Ville*, see pp. 21-22. In this chapter I discuss how photojournalism presents a certain veracity due to a power shift from the depicted subject to the photographer, portraying people in certain settings and situations that conventional portraiture did not usually allow. See pp. 79-90.

⁹⁰ Thomas M. Lennon reiterates this view, stating that such sensory experiences associated with sound, taste, touch and smell served to awaken the narrator's memory, whilst the sensation of vision was largely excluded. Lennon states, 'This exclusion of visual sensation cannot be by chance, and Proust himself seems explicitly to exclude it.' See Thomas M. Lennon, 'Proust and the Phenomenology of Memory', *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 1, April 2007, p. 58.

⁹¹ Proust indicated his mistrust towards photography in two passages from *Within a Budding Grove*. The first example occurs in a conversation between the narrator and his friend Robert de Saint-Loup. Describing the tumultuous relationship between Saint-Loup and his mistress, Proust wrote, 'but he [Saint-Loup] had always refused to show me her photograph, saying "For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. They're only some snapshots that I took myself with my Kodak; they would give you a false impression of her."' A couple of pages later Proust described a scenario when Saint-Loup offered to photograph the narrator's grandmother. The narrator expressed disgust over his grandmother's preoccupation with her appearance for the photographic shoot as he felt her display of vanity was out of character. See Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Volume Two Within A Budding Grove*, Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, London: Everyman, 2001, pp. 137-140.

⁹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Trans. Richard Howard, London: Vintage, 2000, p. 12.

past experiences of his summer holidays to recreate them within his paintings. Photographic aids were used by Vuillard to help revive these memories; photography's inclusion highlighting the difference in how photographs present the past to what is actually remembered by the mind. Bonnard also used photographic aids to help him render experiences sourced from his personal life, in particular to represent his lover, and eventual wife, Marthe de M  ligny. However, his persistent appraisal of Marthe's youthful figure began to contrast with the reality of Marthe's aging body. Bonnard's later paintings are then comparable to photographs, both presenting imagery that dominates how we perceive Marthe and the past. Sickert challenged the traditional conventions of public memory, associated with the official portraiture of public figures, by sourcing candid views of British royalty from newspaper photographs and translating these images into paintings. These natural and un-posed portraits present a different perspective on the lives and personalities of British royalty; their painted forms encourages viewers to reflect more deeply on the depicted scenarios than the original photographs, located in the fast and constantly changing area of print media, would have allowed.

RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST: VUILLARD'S ALTERNATIVE MEMORIES

As the nineteenth-century drew to a close, Vuillard's paintings shifted away from the formalist representation of the instantaneous moment, comparable to the expression of time viewed in snapshot photographs, to explore, instead, the lingering feelings of nostalgia that snapshot photography often inspires. His paintings assumed a softer more emotive tone, differing from the visually jarring scenes he produced in the first decade of his career. Vuillard also expanded on the collective experience of sharing memories, such as looking at photographic albums, by depicting his memories on large-scale painted panels commissioned for private residences. Sometimes, Vuillard's snapshot photographs served as visual aids in the creation of these panels, allowing him the opportunity to take fragments from different

photographs and incorporate them into the one scene. By doing so, Vuillard recreated alternative renditions of the past; highlighting subjective experiences instead of accurately portraying real life.

Memory always played an integral role in Vuillard's paintings. His earlier works were fuelled by Nabis ideology which encouraged artists to paint from their memories and/or personal



Fig. 21, Vuillard, *Mother and Sister of the Artist*, c. 1893.

sensations rather than directly from nature.

These paintings represent Vuillard's personal visions, often sourced from his domestic environment. A lot of these works were undertaken before Vuillard began experimenting with photography, portraying his memories as formalistic studies of the relation

of forms, patterns and colours of the various visual experiences he encountered in his home.

Vuillard created visual tension by the way he incorporated the human figure into the painting's *mise en scène*. For example, Vuillard's painting, *Mother and Sister of the Artist* (Fig. 21), simultaneously displays Vuillard's techniques of merging the human figure within its environment whilst also asserting the human figure's dominance over the pictorial space. Madame Vuillard commands our attention as her squat black-clothed form stands out against the patterned wallpaper, suggesting an authoritative nature. By contrast, Vuillard's sister Marie shirks away from our gaze as her body merges with the décor, her figure uncomfortably stoops over, pressed against the wall where the patterns of her dress and the wallpaper overwhelm her body. This mixture of forms and patterns appear, at first, visually confusing to the eye. Viewers' efforts are then directed towards visually coming to terms with the painting, rather than trying to understand the narrative content. Memories, in these

early paintings, were valued, and hence revived, for their formalistic qualities, rather than for their ability to trigger any recognition of past events.

Vuillard's interest in formalism was also expressed in his photographic practice; his photographs depicting the various visual relationships he recognised between animate and inanimate objects.⁹³ However, Vuillard did utilise his Kodak camera in a more conventional manner, taking snapshots of his domestic and social life. The act of remembrance was just as important for Vuillard as it was for any other amateur photographer of the late nineteenth-century. As Clément Chéroux claims, Vuillard, with his fellow Nabis' Bonnard, Maurice Denis and Félix Vallotton, belonged to the stream of amateur photographers who concentrated on capturing candid shots of their daily lives, rather than worrying about precise photographic techniques.⁹⁴ Vuillard also mentioned in his journal how he, along with Arthur Fontaine and Roussel, spent part of the day looking at family photographs.⁹⁵ This admission demonstrates that Vuillard participated in and valued the act of remembrance, reaching beyond his aesthetic interest in the visual dynamics of a given moment; the shared experience of viewing the photographic albums suggests there was a reminiscent mood to this event.

Around the close of the nineteenth-century, Vuillard's paintings underwent a stylistic transformation, especially in his treatment of the human figure. The visually complex scenes of his earlier paintings were replaced by a gentler and more complimentary union between the human figure and the surrounding *mise en scène*.⁹⁶ This softer approach gives Vuillard's

⁹³ For an in-depth discussion on Vuillard's photographic practice in relation to formalist concerns see pp.34-40.

⁹⁴ Clément Chéroux, 'A Sense of Context: Amateur Photography in the Late Nineteenth Century', in Easton, *Snapshot: Painters and Photography*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Easton notes a similar change in Vuillard's photographic style, claiming that his photographs of the 1890's show women competing for attention with the busy interior settings they occupy, whilst his later photographs depict women who stand out from their surroundings. Easton claims that Vuillard's later photographs encourage viewers to concentrate on the mood or emotional content of the images, contrasting with his earlier photographs. See Easton, 'The Intentional Snapshot', in *Edouard Vuillard*, Ed. Guy Cogeval, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, p 435. However, Vuillard's photographs were not restricted to the representation of women. As I demonstrated in the first chapter (see pp. 35-36, 39-40), men also competed with their interior surroundings in Vuillard's earlier photographs. Vuillard's stylistic change also included men; a series of

paintings a nostalgic tone, reinforced by their thematic nature as Vuillard starts basing his paintings on past experiences. This is evident in the Villeneuve panels, two decorative paintings depicting scenes related to Vuillard's stay at the holiday home of Thadée and Misia Natanson, at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne in the Dijon region, during the summer of 1897.

The two panels (both painted in 1898), commissioned by Jean and Alice Nye Schopfer for their Parisian apartment, show members of Vuillard's social circle relaxing in a leisurely manner in the Natanson's garden. In the first panel, *Woman Reading on a Bench* (Fig. 22), Bonnard and Marthe sit together next to the house, whilst the second panel, *Woman Seated in a Garden* (Fig. 23), shows Misia lounging on a cane chair in the foreground and various individuals loitering in the mid and backgrounds. Vuillard maintained the busy plethora of brushstroke and forms characteristic of his early work, reducing any potential visual tension with his harmonious use of colour.⁹⁷ Muted earthy tones dominate the colour palette, interrupted regularly by various shades of red and white, their bright hues providing an attractive contrast with the panels' overall subdued nature. This colour scheme contributes to the visually pleasing nature of Vuillard's panels, evocative of the pleasurable viewing experience associated with snapshot photography.

Vuillard had purchased his first camera a year before he painted the Villeneuve panels; it was perhaps this acquisition, and his following photographic experiments, that encouraged this change in Vuillard's painting style. The immediacy of Vuillard's snapshot camera probably proved itself a more effective medium for his interest in the given moment and the various

photographs Vuillard took in 1907 focus equally on individual members of Vuillard's social circle, both male and female, as he photographed the candid gestures of his friends engaged in a conversation whilst dining at a restaurant. These photographs include *Romain Coolus in a Restaurant in Normandy* and *Marcelle Aron in a Restaurant in Normandy*.

⁹⁷ This harmonious colour palette could also be attributed to the fact that the panels were commissioned by Jean Schopfer to decorate his Paris apartment, where, as Gloria Groom claims, the panels matched the overall colour scheme of the apartment, making it likely that Vuillard created the panels in consultation with his client. However, the Villeneuve panels do mark a change of direction in Vuillard's aesthetic style to that of a more harmonious and picturesque tone, which he carried on in subsequent paintings. See Gloria Groom, *Edouard Vuillard: Painter-Decorator*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 115-116.

visual dynamics that occur within it, expressed in his earlier paintings.⁹⁸ Yet, Vuillard's snapshots also provided a direct link to the past; photography's aptitude at rendering likeness arouses nostalgic feelings amongst viewers, feelings that often dominate over any consideration of photographs' formalist properties. The sentimentality of snapshot photography transferred over into Vuillard's paintings, in which personal reminiscences, of an emotional nature rather than just aesthetic, were bestowed with a higher significance.

Gloria Groom considers the personal nature of the Villeneuve panels a strange subject choice for Vuillard to portray in a commissioned work. For Groom, Vuillard's panels defy Western tradition of decorative commissions⁹⁹ since he fails to include the Schopfers, an exclusion that Groom considers to be at odds with Jean Schopfer's self-assured personality.¹⁰⁰ However, the Villeneuve panels' subject-matter was not completely foreign to Schopfer, who was part of the Natansons' social circle and, like Vuillard, was a regular guest at the Natansons' Villeneuve residence. Vuillard then recalled memories familiar to both him and his client, acknowledging the Schopfers presence indirectly as viewers looking on at past events. It was not Schopfer's ego that Vuillard was appealing to, but to Schopfer's sense of nostalgic yearning.

⁹⁸ For a more in-depth discussion on Vuillard's interest in the visual dynamics of a given moment see pp. 30-33.

⁹⁹ Groom, pp. 155-116.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 22, Vuillard, *Woman Reading on a Bench*, 1898.



Fig. 23, Vuillard, *Woman Seated in a Garden*, 1898.

Even though the Villeneuve panels portray a similar nostalgic tone to snapshot photographs, it appears that Vuillard did not paint them directly from his own photographs, as was the case with his later paintings. For the two panels, *The Haystack* and *The Alley* (1907-08), commissioned by the Bibesco Princes, Emmanuel and Antoine, Vuillard sourced their imagery from photographs he took whilst on holiday in Normandy during the summer of 1907. Because of Vuillard's use of photographic aids, the Bibesco panels depict scenes of a more personal nature than those portrayed in the Villeneuve panels. Since there seems to be no direct relation between the Villeneuve panels and Vuillard's photographs, the panels seem to represent general reminiscences, which combined with Schopfer's familiarity with Villeneuve made the panels' imagery recognisable to both artist and patron.

Emphasising specific events from the past, and the increased personal nature of the imagery, suggests that Vuillard's intention, for the Bibesco panels, went beyond the concerns of his patrons. Instead his main focus seems to be revisiting the past, an objective, perhaps, encouraged by his partaking in the taking of and looking at snapshot photographs. Painting the Villeneuve panels also provided Vuillard the opportunity to prolong this experience of reminiscence through the creative process, possibly contributing to the recurring theme of nostalgia in the Bibesco panels. This notion is reinforced by the state of Vuillard's relationship with Lucy Hessel, who features in both of the Bibesco panels. Hessel – wife of Bernheim-Jeune's gallery manager Jos Hessel – had a close friendship with Vuillard, leading some art historians to speculate that their relationship was of a romantic nature.¹⁰¹ Whatever the situation, what was clear was that Vuillard shared a close friendship with Hessel, and perhaps it was because of this, plus the overall experience of being on a summer holiday, that inspired Vuillard to depict these moments in the Bibesco panels.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 147-148. See also Easton, 'The Intentional Snapshot', p. 435.



Fig. 24, Vuillard, *The Haystack*, 1907.

In *The Haystack* (Fig. 24) Vuillard presents an alternative view to how the moment actually appears in his photographs. This alternative view was created by Vuillard mixing elements sourced from different photographs into the single moment represented in the painting. Two photographs of Vuillard's are identified by Groom as having contributed to *The Haystack's* final appearance: *Marcelle Aron and Lucy Hessel by a Haystack* (Fig. 25 [photograph one]) and *Tristan Bernard and others at Normandy* (Fig. 26 [photograph two]), both taken in 1907.¹⁰² Groom acknowledges how Vuillard sourced his scene and composition from *Marcelle Aron and Lucy Hessel by a Haystack*, which depicts Aron and Hessel sitting in front of a large haystack, and then added the seated figure of Bernard from the photograph, *Tristan Bernard and others at Normandy*, into the space between Aron and Hessel in *The Haystack*. What Groom has missed is that Vuillard consulted three photographs, not two. The third photograph, *Lucy Hessel and Marcelle Aron in front of a Haystack in Amfreville* (Fig. 27 [photograph three]), is very similar to photograph one, as both appear to be taken on the same day within a similar timeframe. Vuillard actually created *The Haystack's* composition by merging these two photographs together. Photograph one shows Hessel sitting closer to the right edge of the frame with the background cropped out of view. The painting and photograph three both include more of the background, such as the trees on and near the horizon, as well as a little dog positioned diagonally behind Hessel. The poses of the two women also derive from different photographs, Hessel's pose from photograph one whilst Aron's pose is from photograph three.

By mixing imagery from three different photographs into the one scene, Vuillard recreated an alternative vision of the past. Photographs not only served as vessels to carry him back in time but also allowed Vuillard to reconstruct the past accordingly to his desires; whether aesthetic or otherwise. With the Bibesco panels, Vuillard seemed to value this reconstruction

¹⁰² Groom, p. 156.



Fig. 25, Vuillard, *Marcelle Aron and Lucy Hessel by a Haystack*, 1907.



Fig. 26, Vuillard, *Tristan Bernard and Others at Normandy*, 1907.



Fig. 27, Vuillard, *Lucy Hessel and Marcelle Aron in front of a Haystack in Amfreville*, 1907.



Fig. 28, Vuillard, *The Alley*, 1907.



Fig. 29, Vuillard, *Lucy Hessel at Amfreville*, 1907.

of the past over maintaining visual consistency between the two panels, contrasting with the Villeneuve panels. Whilst the second Bibesco panel, *The Alley* (Fig. 28), was also painted from a photograph (Fig. 29) taken that same summer, the emotive tone the painting emits differs from *The Haystack*. In *The Alley* Hessel, accompanied by a dog, sits on a bench in a tree lined pathway. The colours do correspond to those used in *The Haystack*, however the use of light varies, creating a different atmospheric

effect in each painting. The sunlight filters through the trees in *The Alley*, basking Hessel and the alleyway with light, giving the scene a warm and inviting atmosphere evocative of a pleasant summer's day. In contrast, the dark murky sky of *The Haystack* gives the painting a more sombre tone, reflected by Bernard and Hessel's closed and pensive body language.

The emotive tone Vuillard gave *The Haystack* contributes to the notion that the painting depicts a recreated past rather than an accurate representation. *The Alley* depicts the light in a similar manner as portrayed in the original photograph. Overall, Vuillard changed very little between the photograph and *The Alley*; the only major difference being that of converting the square format of the photograph into the rectangular frame of the painting. However, the two photographs of Aron and Hessel sitting in front of the haystack were taken on a sunny day, evident by the light tone of the sky and

the overall brightness of the scene. This deliberate change of light transforms the mood from a light-hearted joyful scene, as other photographs Vuillard took that day attest to, to one burdened with an emotional heaviness.

Why Vuillard made this change is not certain, by doing so it aided him in the recreation of an alternative memory, which seems to express some kind of subjective response. The two contrasting emotive tones of the Bibesco panels also seem to represent the various emotional reactions we experience and remember. In *The Haystack*, Vuillard expands the act of remembrance to reach beyond the whimsical and pleasant feelings of nostalgia associated with snapshot photographs, and expressed in his earlier Villeneuve panels. Snapshot photography restricts our memories, and the past, to that of life's pleasant and joyful moments, whilst ignoring negative experiences and emotions. Their one-sided view contrasts with the memories stored in the mind, which remembers a wider range of experiences and the various emotional responses associated with them.

The multiple views Vuillard depicted in *The Haystack* could then, perhaps, be a subtle commentary on the formulation of memories. As our memories are influenced by our emotional reactions their recollection does not always correspond to what actually occurred at the point of time that saw their initial creation. Our perception of time as a linear process becomes tangled within the depths of the mind where incidences from different events or moments can merge into a single memory. Therefore, memories stored in the mind are not necessarily accurate representations of the past but are subject to change, just as the original whispered sentence does in a game of Chinese whispers. By contrast, photographs present the past, and memories, in a static format impermeable to change. Of this difference Geoffrey Batchen states, 'Memory, in contrast, is selective, fuzzy in outline, intensively subjective, often incoherent, and invariably changes over time – a conveniently malleable form of

fiction.¹⁰³ The mystique that shrouds memories is then dispelled when one looks at photographs; with this gained clarity the mind no longer needs to engage the imagination as extensively as it does when thinking about the past without the aid of photographs.

As Proust, Barthes and Batchen all implied, it is the various physical sensations experienced through our other senses, aside from the visual, which inform our recollection of the past. Such sensations are not easily expressed in photographs, and as Barthes and Batchen both claimed, photographs hold the potential to supersede the mind's memories, replacing them with its own imagery, void of the original emotional content that served to initially remember the past.¹⁰⁴ The differences between the emotional sensations linked to memories stored within our minds and the imagery presented in photographs was a conflict Vuillard seemed to become aware of when painting *The Haystack*. In his essay 'Vuillard and his Kodak', Salomon relayed the struggle Vuillard experienced when trying to incorporate the photographs' imagery into *The Haystack*. This conflict Salomon attributed to the fact that photographs are static or 'preserved' renditions of life in comparison to the organic nature of paintings, which he called 'living organisms'.¹⁰⁵ Salomon's reference suggests that paintings form part of the fluid nature of life, more susceptible to change whether in the creative process or in the various reactions and changing opinions experienced by the audience. Painting's fluidity is, therefore, a more natural fit with the mind's memories. For Salomon, it seems that photograph's 'preserved' moments counteracts the state of flux that dominates life, and our memories, with photography's static nature making it difficult to represent our subjective responses. He wrote, 'Though the personality of the photographer may be seen in the choice of subject as well as in the composition, as in the case of Degas and Vuillard,

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ Batchen, p. 15, Barthes, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ Salomon, p. 3.

photography can only pretend to record what has been offered to it and there it has its limits.’¹⁰⁶

VISIONS OF MARTHE: MEMORY VERSUS IDENTITY IN BONNARD’S PAINTINGS

Throughout Bonnard’s career, memories of his visual sensations dominated his paintings. Bonnard, like Vuillard, was also a member of the Nabis; involvement with this artistic group encouraged Bonnard to paint from his memories, often painting his lifelong partner, Marthe. Photographs Bonnard took of his young love served as the starting point for his lifelong obsession of depicting Marthe’s nude form in paint.¹⁰⁷ At first, Marthe’s poses in Bonnard’s paintings closely resembles the photographs, the main difference being Bonnard’s shift of perspective to represent his personal viewpoint within his paintings. As the years passed, the photographs transitioned from practical guides to become beacons of the past, representing Bonnard’s initial desire for Marthe. His later paintings show Marthe eternally youthful despite the fact she was then an old woman. Because of this, and Bonnard’s repeated depictions of Marthe bathing, her identity was compromised as she became an object of the past reflecting Bonnard’s desires.

When Bonnard discussed his art he sometimes referred to a notion he coined ‘the first idea’.¹⁰⁸ Bonnard used this term to describe his initial reaction to a subject; it was this reaction that Bonnard hoped to resurrect in his paintings. His notion of the ‘first idea’ is prevalent in the two photographic series that Bonnard took of Marthe’s nude form between 1899 and 1901; the first in their Parisian apartment and the second in the garden at a house

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Originally I used the term naked to describe Marthe’s appearance in Bonnard’s paintings, however after some consideration I decided to use the word nude as this term suggests a certain distance or formality between the subject and the artist/viewer. Even though Bonnard knew Marthe intimately, hence my original choice of the word naked, his representation of her is not one based on expressing her personality but on expressing his visual experience and perception of her, thereby presenting Marthe’s form as a visual study in which nude is a more fitting term.

¹⁰⁸ Bonnard, ‘Propos recueillis en 1943 par Angèle Lamotte’, *Verve*, quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, ‘Bonnard’s Passivity’, in Pagé, *Pierre Bonnard The Work of Art*, p. 61.

Bonnard rented in Montval. It was this act of photographing Marthe that triggered an interest in Bonnard to depict Marthe's figure in paintings, she previously had featured little in Bonnard's work even though they had been together since 1893. Initially, these photographs served a practical function, aiding Bonnard in his illustrative work for the publications of Paul Verlaine's *Parallèlement* (1901) and Longus' *Daphnis et Chloe* (1902). Bonnard most likely created these photographs to use as visual aids for his commissions since Marthe appears aware of the camera, purposely assuming different poses that differ from Bonnard's usual candid photographic style.¹⁰⁹ Some of the illustrations closely resemble the original photographs, such as the illustration for *La pastorale de Longus* on page 69 (Fig. 31) in which the female figure assumes the same pose as Marthe in *Marthe Standing in the Sunlight* (Fig. 30), one of the photographs Bonnard took at Montval.



Fig. 30, Bonnard, *Marthe Standing in the Sunlight*, 1900-01.



Fig. 31, Bonnard, Illustration for *La pastorale de Longus*, c.1901.

Around the same time Bonnard completed these illustrations he also began a series of paintings depicting Marthe's nude form in a bedroom setting. These paintings are comparable to Bonnard's Paris photographs as they both depict the same setting, whilst also showing Marthe in similar poses to those seen in the photographs. However, these photographs seemed to serve only as the seed of inspiration for the paintings. Unlike his illustrative work,

¹⁰⁹ Bonnard used his camera mainly to photograph his family and friends in social situations. These photographs appear un-posed, depicting the natural circumstances of life. I discuss in further detail Bonnard's photographic practice in the third chapter of this thesis, see pp. 107-112.

Bonnard did not directly copy Marthe's poses from the photographs into his paintings. The tone of the paintings differs to that of the photographs as Bonnard represents his personal visual experiences in the former. Bonnard achieved this by portraying a perspective that represents his personal vantage point of Marthe, contrasting with the objective depersonalised viewpoint of the photographs. In *Nude with Black Stockings* (Fig. 32) Marthe's pose is similar to one she assumed in the Parisian photograph *Marthe Seated on a Bed with Her Hands Behind Her* (Fig. 33). Both images depict Marthe seated on the edge of the bed with her legs over the side. Her torso appears taunt, her seated position emphasising the curve of her hips.

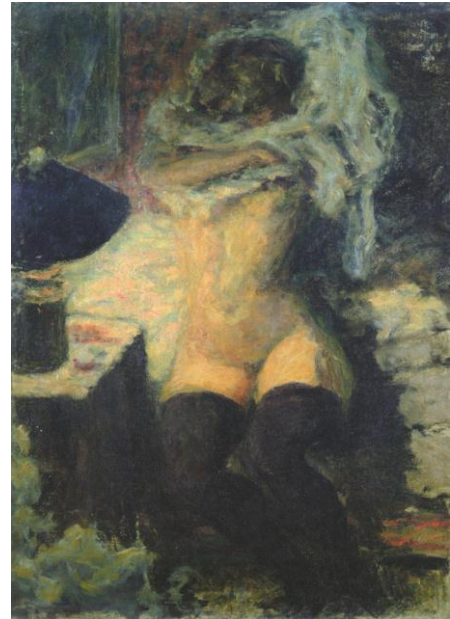


Fig. 32, Bonnard, *Nude with Black Stockings*, c.1900.

Yet this is where the similarities end. Marthe's pose in the photographic version appears awkward, photographed, seemingly, shifting between poses, aware of the camera's presence and her need to perform. The painting shows a more relaxed and self-absorbed Marthe, due to the different upper body pose she assumes. Rather than rest her hands behind her

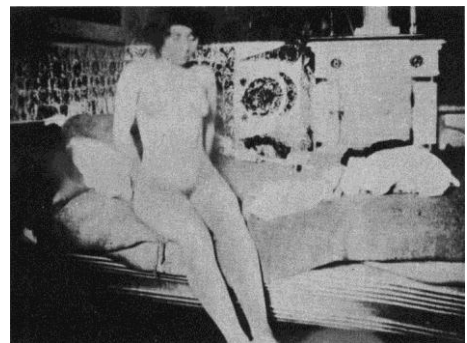


Fig. 33, Bonnard, *Marthe Seated on a Bed with Her Hands Behind Her*, 1899-1900.

back, Marthe undresses, pulling an item of clothing over her head, exposing her body from the breasts down. The act of undressing has the potential to appear awkward; Bonnard, however, gave this scene an erotic charge by casting the soft warm glow of the bedside lamp across Marthe's exposed body. The dim lighting also creates a dark shadow along Marthe's left side, accentuating her curvaceous form. Bonnard made a point of changing the perspective to reflect a more personal point of view. With the photograph we look at Marthe

straight-on, however looking upwards slightly as Bonnard has photographed her from a lower vantage point. For Bonnard to have obtained this perspective he would have needed to squat down towards the floor, making this view not representative of a natural vantage point from daily experience, but indicative of a staged moment. Bonnard elevates our point of view in *Nude with Black Stockings*, so that we gaze down at Marthe's figure. This perspective represents a more intimate and natural viewpoint, one that suggests we are looking at Marthe through a lover's eyes.

Bonnard continued to paint in this manner, including mirrors in his paintings to express further his private visual experiences of Marthe's figure, evident in such works as *Reflection* (1909). Photographs sometimes still served as a starting point for Bonnard, Marthe's portrayal in the three paintings, *Nude in the Tub* (1913), *Nude in the Tub* (c.1916 [Fig. 35]) and *Nude Crouching with Tub* (1918) all stemmed from one photograph, *Marthe Bathing* (Fig. 34). However these paintings do not possess the seductive quality of Bonnard's earlier bedroom nudes. Instead the tub paintings seem to represent the stage in Bonnard's and

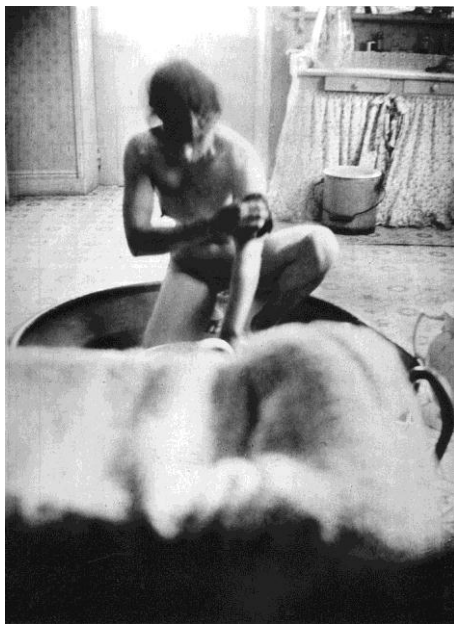


Fig. 34, Bonnard, *Marthe Bathing*, c.1908.



Fig. 35, Bonnard, *Nude in the Tub*, c.1916.

Marthe's relationship when a comfortable intimacy has developed, replacing the intense sexual energy of their younger years. Again Bonnard offered his personal viewpoint, the viewer's gaze hovers over Marthe, looking down at her in the tub. This perspective differs from the photograph; Marthe is again photographed straight on so that the viewer's gaze is on the same level as Marthe's body. All three paintings replicate the crouching position of Marthe's legs in the photograph, yet show variations on the position of her upper body.¹¹⁰ The repetitive nature of these bathing scenes seems to represent Bonnard's daily experience, doing so more strongly than the earlier bedroom paintings. Bonnard repetitively painted Marthe bathing over the course of many years, contrasting with the bedroom paintings which were completed within one year.

Marthe's bathing form was a regular feature in Bonnard's paintings from the 1910's through to her death in 1942. Over the years this recurring theme shifted from Bonnard's representation of his visual accounts of daily life, to instead represent his memories and yearnings for the past. His later paintings do not exhibit any formal traits comparable to those in his photographs. Instead they seem to evoke the feeling of nostalgia associated with snapshot photography. When we look at *Nude in the Bath* (Fig. 36), for example, we are not looking at a contemporaneous representation of Marthe (who at that stage was in her sixties), but a vision of her that harks back to her youthful body at the beginning of the century. *Nude in the Bath* is representative of Bonnard's late bathtub works, which often depict Marthe stretched out, motionless in the bathtub. In the earlier paintings, Marthe's various poses show

¹¹⁰ Bonnard's depiction of Marthe's figure frozen mid-motion, whilst bathing, is often compared to Degas' treatment of female bathers. This is because both artists' works contrast with how the Academy has traditionally represented the bathing scene. For a more in-depth discussion on the history of bathing scenes, see Nochlin, *Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 3-53. However, a striking difference exists between the two artists, regarding their representations of the bathing motif. Degas presents formalistic studies of the body in motion, creating a distance between the female bather and the viewer. Whereas, Bonnard presents observations of a body he intimately knows well, as his great-nephew Antoine Terrasse suggests, 'All these nudes are tranquil, unprovocative; we sense the painter's intimate understanding of his model, the tact and sensitivity of his response.' See Antoine Terrasse, *Bonnard: Biographical and Critical Study (The Taste of Our Time)*, Trans. Stuart Gilbert, Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1964, pp. 47-48.

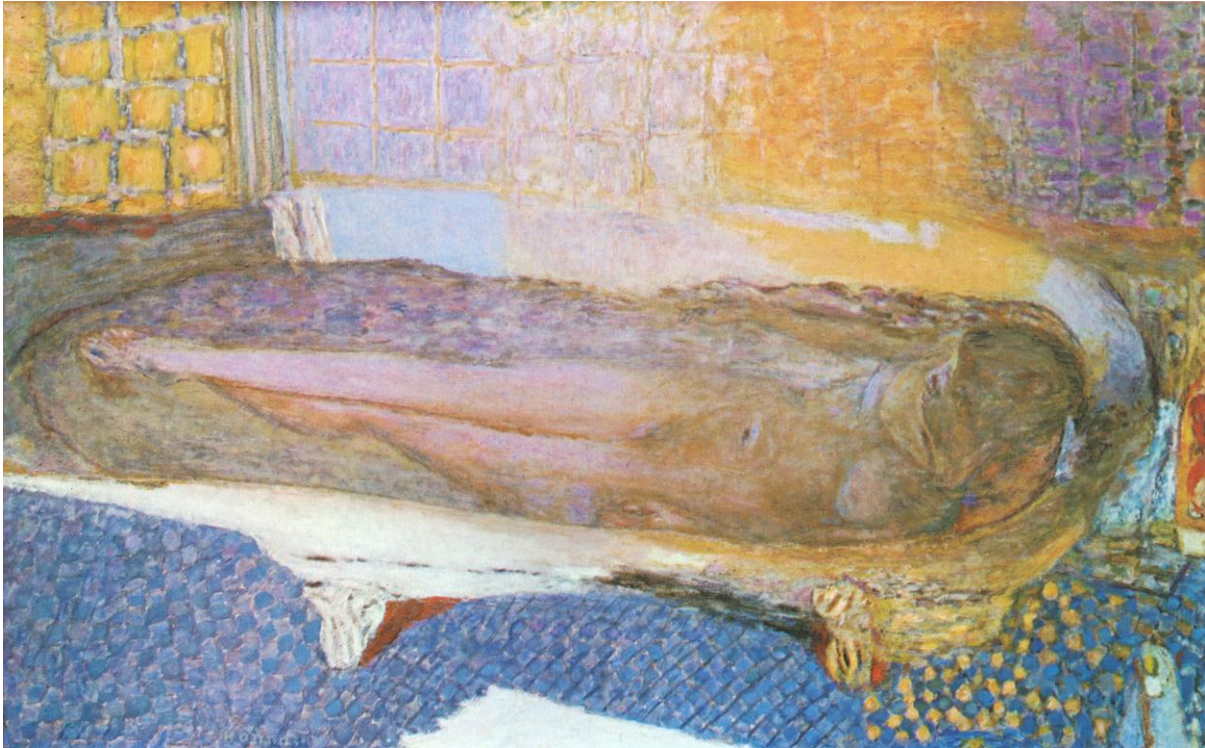


Fig. 36, Bonnard, *Nude in the Bath*, 1937-38.

that she was engaged in the daily activities of life, expressing herself as an individual entity. Her stagnant form in the later works means that Marthe risks losing her identity as her body becomes a vessel to transport Bonnard back in time. He painted her as if she was already dead, in grief, clinging to the past as he desperately attempted to resurrect Marthe at her prime.

Critics often accuse these later works of possessing an unsettling tone. Linda Nochlin sums this sentiment up well, stating, 'There is something abject and sinister about Bonnard's later Bathers: the force impelling them is not desire itself but the memory of desire, the ghost of desire, desire as a revenant come back to haunt the still, tepid surface of the bathwater.'¹¹¹ The abject tone Nochlin reads in these paintings can be attributed to the manner with which Bonnard has objectified Marthe, for she has fallen victim to Barthes' notion of the subject's death. The photographic process, for Barthes, entailed the death of the subject, as a living

¹¹¹ From text that Nochlin sent to Pagé in October 2005, quoted in *Pierre Bonnard: The Work of Art*, p. 205. Sebastian Smee also finds Bonnard's repetitive depictions of Marthe lying in the bathtub unsettling and slightly sinister, see Sebastian Smee, 'Marthe too long in the bathwater', *The Australian*, 31st March 2006, p. 16.

body was transformed into the viewed object within the photograph.¹¹² Bonnard took the living body of Marthe and turned her into the viewed object within his paintings. Marthe's identity is suppressed; our perception of her dominated by the repetitive scenes of her bathing. For what do we really know about Marthe aside from what Bonnard decided to show us? Marthe was a character just as mystifying in her own era as ours.¹¹³ Suzanne Pagé rightly asks,

And who is the woman, portrayed naked, at her toilette, in the bath, at the table, in the garden? Everyone knows and recognises her, Marthe, the 'model' woman, ageless, fetish of every mirror, whose features are never quite distinct. Was she an essential presence for Bonnard the man, an eroticisation necessary to Bonnard the painter, or simply a body-pretext – a surface for fixing a 'coloured material traversed by light',* and never truly a 'subject?'¹¹⁴

Since Marthe was such a mysterious figure, we only have Bonnard's paintings to give us any clue to who she really was. Bonnard's authority on Marthe's identity evokes Batchen's notion of photography's authority over the past.¹¹⁵ Batchen suggests that photographs dominate our mind's mental recollections of the past, replacing these memories with their static portrayals of life. Memories then become defined by the photographs we take, keep and look at, rather than informed by our individual perceptions. To highlight his point, Batchen asks his readers if they can recall memories from their childhoods that do not resemble their family photographs.¹¹⁶ Marthe not only goes through the Barthesian death of the subject, but her identity is replaced by Bonnard's perception and representation of her, thereby suppressing her individual entity. Bonnard holds the key to our understanding of who Marthe really was, yet he only seems to show us one aspect: that of an object of his personal visual experiences.

¹¹² Barthes, pp. 12-15.

¹¹³ According to Annette Vaillant, Thadée Natanson's daughter, Marthe's background was a mystery since she never spoke about her family and where she was from. See Annette Vaillant, *Bonnard: Ou le Bonheur de Voir*, Paris: Editions Ides et Calendes, 1965, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Pagé, introduction to *Pierre Bonnard The Work of Art*, p. 22.

*Quote from Pierre Bonnard's Diaries housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

¹¹⁵ Batchen, pp. 15-16.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

Perhaps Bonnard's limited insight into Marthe's personal history was an indication that the elusive Marthe remained an enigma even to him; an individual he could never quite get to know or understand completely.¹¹⁷

Bonnard's photographic practice roughly spanned a period of twenty years, ending in the late 1910's. Bonnard did not have the same sustained interest in photography as he did for painting, possibly because of his desire to paint from his memories. Bonnard's later comments on painting suggests that he preferred painting directly from the eye's visual experience, and the emotional values it bestowed, over the precise details offered by the camera lens.¹¹⁸ This opinion could also be indicative of Bonnard's attitude towards memories. Photographs depict every detail that filters through the lens, thus providing clear defined moments of the past. Memories, as Batchen also notes,¹¹⁹ are fuzzy vague recollections influenced by our emotional responses to events. It is this difference between how photographs and the mind store memories that possibly steered Bonnard away from photography.

Perhaps photography's emphasis on clarity rather than emotion also threatened Bonnard's notion of the 'first idea', an initial response to the subject in which emotion played an important part. For Bonnard, the 'first idea' was driven by the artist's seduction over the subject; if this seduction diminished then the subject merely became that of an object. Ironically, Bonnard's seduction by Marthe's body did just that, robbing her of her identity to become an object of memory and desire. Yet in terms of memory, painting proved to be more effective than photography for Bonnard to express his personal experiences and memories of Marthe. In the end Bonnard rejected photography's clarity, embracing instead the fluid nature

¹¹⁷ Sarah Whitfield claims that Bonnard did not learn of Marthe's real name until their marriage in 1925. It also seems that Bonnard never met any of Marthe's family, see Sarah Whitfield, 'Fragments of an Ideal World', *Bonnard*, Sarah Whitfield and John Elderfield, London: Tate Gallery, 1998, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ In the third chapter I discuss further Bonnard's opinions on the differences between the eye's visual experiences and those recorded by the camera lens. See pp. 127-128.

¹¹⁹ Batchen, p. 16.

of memories sourced directly from life's experiences and subsequently stored in the mind. Bonnard also seemed to understand how memories do not always conform to the notion of linear time, merging different moments and events into a single moment. The later paintings blend different periods of time into a single moment, indicating remnants of the past: Marthe's youthful figure. And alluding to the future: Marthe's still body encased within the tub, an image that Nochlin likens to a tomb.¹²⁰

SICKERT AND THE KING: REMEMBERING ROYALTY

From the late 1920's onwards, Sickert increasingly painted from newspaper photographs, translating their candid and informal qualities into his paintings. A number of these paintings included portraits of royalty, whose candid appearances contrast with the traditional conventions of Academic portraiture. Newspaper photographs provide unguarded views into the lives and characters of famous individuals, presenting unique insights not usually apparent in formal portraiture. Sickert's adoption of photojournalism's candid style emphasised the new perspective that this burgeoning photographic medium offered, whilst also introducing an alternative visual language for the remembrance of public figures.

Photojournalists record people outside of the stuffy confines of the traditional portrait studio or setting, instead photographing them in the midst of the real world. The naturalistic and spontaneous manner of photojournalism appealed to Sickert, who preferred a realistic approach to portraiture over idealism of any kind.¹²¹ As Sickert once proclaimed in a lecture, 'If a man is fat you should paint him fat. You never forget a man like that. Why not paint him as he is?'¹²² For Sickert, photojournalism's manner of recording people unaware, during the

¹²⁰ Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty*, pp. 139-140.

¹²¹ Sickert expressed his distaste for highly staged scenes in his 1934 lecture given at the Margate School of Art. He stated, 'What often happens is that at art schools they get a girl with no clothes on sitting on a box and they draw her. That is not drawing from nature. Ophelia didn't do that and it is not drawing from nature. It would be better to draw them as anything rather than sitting naked on a box.' See Sickert, 'Squaring Up a Drawing', in Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 639.

¹²² Ibid.

course of daily life, gives viewers precious insight of the characteristics of those photographed. A wider context is then provided as photographed individuals are represented in the process of living their lives rather than in contrived settings. This point Sickert stressed in a lecture, discussing the conception of his painting *King George V and his Racing Manager: A Conservation Piece at Aintree* (Fig. 37). Sickert stated,

I had an instance which pleased me very much indeed. I painted a portrait of the King and he did not sit to me. I got my material from an instantaneous photograph and by chance Major Featherstonhaugh was standing talking to the King at the time the photograph was taken and neither knew they were being photographed. In those circumstances you get much more information – much more than from an isolated person. As you do for instance when you see portraits at exhibitions where the subject is painted against a green or black background. Nobody is isolated like that, you are always against something. From the portrait painted like that you do not get the three dimensions. In the particular photograph I have been talking about the expression on Major Featherstonhaugh's face was so very interesting. There was a sort of affectionate deference which showed you something about his attitude towards the king. If you put people into their proper milieu with others it is not like putting them up on a platform and asking them to "look pleasant".¹²³

As Sickert mentioned, it was the photograph's (Fig. 38) depiction of the King in a context that made the image interesting, and thus attracted his attention.¹²⁴ Sickert painted *King George and His Racing Manager* directly from the newspaper photograph, the painting remaining faithful to the original composition within the photograph. However Sickert made one change, he eliminated the distracting, and out of focus, lower portion of the photograph to crop in closer to the men's faces. Sickert's crop further highlights what can be considered the crux of the image; the interaction and the relationship between the two men. For Sickert,

¹²³ Sickert, 'Colour Study: Importance of Scale', lecture given 16th November 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 652-653.

¹²⁴ It is important to note that Sickert was not the first portrait painter to depict individuals, especially well-known ones, within a specific context outside of the portraiture studio. Thomas Gainsborough, eighteenth-century English painter, also depicted elite and notable individuals of English society in specific scenarios, which served to represent their characters. Gainsborough's *William Poyntz* (1762) shows William Poyntz, son of the Rt. Hon. Stephen Poyntz, in what Malcolm Cormack calls 'the idea of the sportsman at ease in nature.' Gainsborough expressed his sitters' interests, and an attitude to life, that extended beyond the comforts of the upper-class domestic environment. However, Sickert provided a fresh perspective on the conventional portrait since his paintings did not endeavour to represent his sitters in a certain manner that was generally endorsed by the patron. See Malcolm Cormack, *The Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 72.



Fig. 37, Sickert, *King George V and his Racing Manager: A Conservation Piece at Aintree*, c.1929-30.



Fig. 38, Article from *The Daily Express*, Tuesday December 23rd 1930.

the candid nature of the photograph revealed an aspect of the King's life which was not usually represented in official portraits. As Richard Morphet claims, photography allowed Sickert to go beyond perceived reality and access the underlying essence of the scene.¹²⁵

Sickert's candid portrayal of King George V contrasts with traditional visual representations of royalty. The royal portrait was created in a controlled environment where such aspects as dress, setting and props were carefully coordinated. This manufactured scene was created to



Fig. 39, Grant, *Queen Victoria*, 1843.

bestow royal figures with favourable ideals, presenting them in a good light to the greater public. Sir Francis Grant's portrait, *Queen Victoria* (Fig. 39), represents this approach. Props within the painting's *mise en scène* serve to present the young monarch in an positive light, a vase of flowers sits at the right edge of the scene reflecting the Queen's youthful and feminine demeanour, the inclusion of classical columns in the background align the Queen's reign with the ideals of liberty and democracy, suggesting that the Queen is a benevolent ruler. With Queen Victoria dressed in all her

finery, the painting emits the noble dignified tone long associated with royal portraiture. It was, perhaps, paintings such as Grant's that inspired Sickert to make the following statement on portraiture, 'The commissioned portrait must always be a matter of collaboration, collaboration between the artist and the sitter's vanity, or rather, and perhaps this is the more important factor, the sitter's desire for advertisement.'¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Richard Morphet, 'Late Sickert, then and now', in Marianne Hollis, Ed. *Late Sickert: Paintings 1927 to 1942*, London: Graphis Press Ltd., 1981, p. 14.

¹²⁶ Sickert, 'The Royal Academy', *Southport Visiter*, 10th May 1924, quoted in Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 492.

It was the patron's involvement in the final outcome of portraits that, for Sickert, threatened the artistic innovation and originality of the portrait painter. Sickert viewed the commercial relationship between artist and patron as one that resulted in the artist comprising his or her creative vision in order to meet the demands of the client. This condition of the artist/patron relationship Sickert recognised as being applicable to all artists, despite their level of fame and talent. Of the prominent portrait painter, John Singer Sargent, Sickert stated,

I need not labour the truth, with which I have already dealt, that the work of the modern fashionable portrait-painter has to be considered as, in a sense, a collaboration, a compromise between what the painter would like to do, and what his employer will put up with. Mr Sargent, who has an acute sense of, and keen delight in, character, has no wish to compromise more than he need. But the ineluctable laws that rule the relations of employer and employed are there for him as for others.¹²⁷

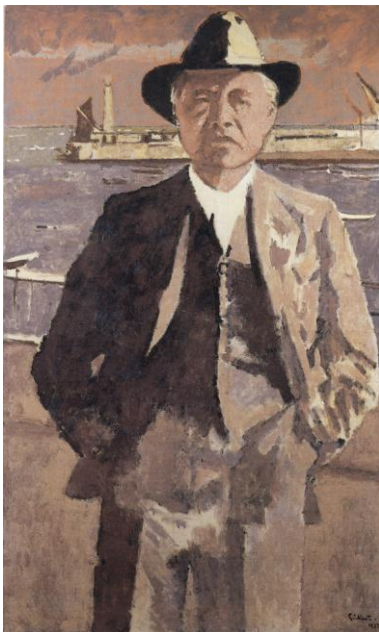


Fig. 40, Sickert, *Lord Beaverbrook*, 1934-35.

Patrons' interference in how they, or their family or friends, were to be represented, and remembered, was a factor of portraiture that Sickert did not look favourably upon. Sickert turned to commissions when he was lacking in funds, however he always remained faithful to his artistic vision, sometimes at the expense of his patrons' satisfaction. Canadian financier Sir James Dunn experienced Sickert's inflexible attitude after he commissioned the artist to paint twelve portraits of his friends and associates. Dunn's conservative tastes and

demands clashed with Sickert's candid and slow painting style. He twice rejected *Lord Beaverbrook* (Fig. 40), which depicts the politician and press magnate standing in front of Margate Harbour.¹²⁸ After this rejection, Sickert only completed one more commissioned

¹²⁷ Sickert, 'Sargentolatry', *The New Age*, 19th May 1910, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹²⁸ Sickert's depiction of Lord Beaverbrook at Margate Harbour was an interesting choice since Beaverbrook had never visited the coastal British town before the painting was created. Beaverbrook's pose was taken from a

work, *The Viscount Castlerosse* (1935), for Dunn.¹²⁹ The deterioration of Sickert's and Dunn's relationship meant that Sickert did not fully complete the twelve commissioned portraits.

Sickert's desire to retain full creative license over his paintings is probably what made press photographs so appealing to him. Photojournalists operate freely from the demands of their photographed subjects; the balance of control heavily weighted towards the photographers as they move about the public arena, photographing individuals when and where they see fit. The creation of memory was no longer restricted to artists' studios, where they were strongly tethered to the clients' desires, but expanded to include the unpredictable and informal realm of public spaces; the stealthy movements of photojournalists meant that quick fleeting candid moments of time could be quickly captured and highlighted in the photograph's static form.

As it was Sickert's desire to depict individuals in a natural manner, he turned to newspaper photographs, along with snapshots, to aid his portraiture. At a time when the British Royal Academy was still steeped in tradition – Sickert was a Royal Academician until his resignation in 1935 – Sickert's depiction of such esteemed figures, especially royalty, would have been a revolutionary development in portraiture and its role in the formation of public memory. Sickert's use of a press photograph for the creation of *King George V and his Racing Manager* was widely publicised at the time, articles in the *Daily Express* and *The Graphic* published Sickert's painting and the press photograph side by side. Whilst the *Daily*

snapshot of him that Sickert happened to view by chance in the press. Sickert was already using another photograph of Beaverbrook, showing him in Dunn's London home, however, Beaverbrook's expression in the second photograph, showing Beaverbrook standing on a verandah with his hands in his pockets, appealed to Sickert, who wrote to Beaverbrook requesting a print. That Sickert depicted Beaverbrook in a location he had never been to gives the painting an imaginative quality, contrasting with Sickert's depiction of public figures in real life circumstances. Unfortunately, a discussion about these two qualities of Sickert's portraiture reaches beyond the scope of this chapter. For more on the exchange between Sickert and Beaverbrook regarding the photograph, see Shone, *Sickert Paintings*, p. 320.

¹²⁹ Castlerosse – the 6th Earl of Kenmare, Killarney, Ireland, and a gossip columnist for the British Press – had already sat for Sickert, which mainly comprised of Lessore taking snapshot photographs of him. Sickert only completed the portrait as he did not want to disappoint Castlerosse, who had already given his time to meet with the artist. See *Ibid.*, p. 322.

Express' article did not judge Sickert's use of a photographic study, it did mention that Sickert's painting was the first one from an Academy member that openly acknowledged its photographic roots.¹³⁰ Sickert's inscription, 'Courtesy of the Topical Press' in the top right hand corner of the painting, plus his agreement for *The Daily Express* and *The Graphic* to publish his painting next to the original photograph, was consistent with Sickert's earlier view that artists and critics should be open about the use of photographs as study aids during the painting process.¹³¹ However, as Richard Shone also notes, Sickert's open attitude towards his use of photographic aids revived the debate about whether or not painters should paint from photographs.¹³²

King George V and his Racing Manager was not well-received by the British art community of the 1930's, with many art galleries turning down the offer to acquire the painting. Shone suggests that the Glasgow Art Gallery turned down the painting, which was gifted to the gallery, because it was not stately enough.¹³³ It seems that galleries did not take too kindly to Sickert's candid portrayal of the King. It was possibly this factor, more so than the painting's photographic origins, which provoked the painting's poor reception. Two years later, Sickert was just as open about his photographic source for *La Louve* (Fig. 41), a portrait of the actress Gwen Ffrangon-Davies in costume as Isabell of



Fig. 41, Sickert, *La Louve*, 1932.

¹³⁰ *The Daily Express*, December 23rd 1930, p. 3.

¹³¹ I mention Sickert's viewpoint on this matter in the first chapter of this thesis. See p. 47.

¹³² Shone, *Sickert Paintings*, p. 300.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

France from the play *Edward II*. This painting was well received by the British press, stating it was Sickert's best work yet.¹³⁴ The portrait was painted from a photograph Sickert spied in Ffrançon-Davies' photograph album, taken by Bertram Park when the actress was waiting in the theatre's wings during a dress rehearsal. On the lower left corner of the portrait, Sickert credited the image's origins, including Park's name and the word phot. That Sickert openly acknowledged his use of a photographic study for Ffrançon-Davies' portrait suggests that it was the context that Sickert set his figures in which determined whether his work was well-received or not. Ffrançon-Davies's locale was entirely appropriate for her profession; however the King's portrayal at the horse-races, instead of in a stately interior or engaged in a royal duty, was, perhaps, not considered an appropriate situation in which to represent such an important figure as the nation's monarch.

Sickert's candid portrayal of royalty supports the notion that photojournalism generated a power shift that favoured artistic creativity, no matter how influential the represented individuals were. Photography provided a distance between the artist and the subject, a distance in which subject behaviour was less guarded than in the intimate confines of the artist's studio, where subjects were aware of the artist's observations. In 1936 Sickert declared the end of studio portrait sittings, and also suggested that painting from photographs quashed any possible influence a sitter could have on a painting's final outcome. He stated, 'The era of "sittings" is over. With the invention of instantaneous photography, the photographer must have the credit of his inventive selection.'¹³⁵ Partaking in this inventive selection, as Robert Emmons noted, Sickert chose the photographs he painted from with the utmost consideration.¹³⁶ Painting royalty from newspaper photographs helped Sickert to

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 312.

¹³⁵ Sickert, 'Statue of the King', *Daily Telegraph*, 3rd September 1936, quoted in Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, p. 685.

¹³⁶ Emmons discusses Sickert's artistic practice in regards to photographs which were created specifically to act as study aids and does not mention press photographs. However, it can be assumed that Sickert's selective

create alternative perspectives of these well known figures. Rather than representing them as superior figureheads of the nation, they are presented as ordinary individuals. Removed from the lofty ideals associated with portraiture, Sickert's depictions of royalty showcases these individuals engaged in life. Even when out and about performing royal duties, the candid nature of photojournalism, and Sickert's astute eye, selected moments that exposed their vulnerable or unguarded expressions.

This alternative view of royalty is evident in Sickert's painting *HM King. Edward VIII* (Fig. 43). Again Sickert sourced his imagery from a press photograph, taken by Harold J. Clements (Fig. 42) when the King seems to be unaware of the photographer's presence as he disembarks from a car on the way to an official



Fig. 42, Clements, *King Edward VIII*, 1936.



Fig. 43, Sickert, *HM. King Edward VIII*, 1936.

behaviour would also apply to his selection of press photographs, considering how particular Sickert was in selecting specific moments to represent in his paintings. For Emmons' discussion, see Robert Emmons, *The Life and Opinions of Walter Richard Sickert*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1941, p. 213.

engagement.¹³⁷ In the photograph the King appears awkward as Clements has captured his body in mid-stride, stepping out onto the pavement. The King's facial features and body language indicates an underlying feeling of apprehension, he glances to the side as he protects his body with his arms, drawn in close clutching his bearskin, seemly acting as a shield. He appears uncertain and even afraid. It was this unguarded expression that possibly attracted Sickert's attention, in his painting he emphasised further the King's awkward disposition. Sickert did this by slightly enlarging the upper body and head of the King, whilst maintaining a similar proportion of the legs in comparison to the photograph. However the King's legs do appear thinner than in the photograph, when combined with the larger upper body gives the King's gait a lanky unstable quality. The King's bodily proportions ensure that his form fills up the entire length of the composition; whilst the enlarged head directs our attention to his face. This is reinforced by the sharp lines and shadows on his face, which are softer in the photograph, making the King's face stand out against the background, and also drawing our attention to his apprehensive facial expression. By making such subtle changes from the photograph to his painting, Sickert, in a method similar to *The King and His Racing Manager*, emphasises what he considered to be the focal point of the scene; the King's awkward demeanour.

Sickert's portrait of the King holds an important place in royal history for two reasons, firstly, it was the only portrait completed of King Edward VIII during his reign, and, secondly, the awkward and uncertain stance of the King seemed to allude to his abdication from the throne in December 1936, the same year Sickert painted the portrait. Beaverbrook viewed Sickert's portrait as a prediction made by the artist on this major event in royal history.¹³⁸ Baron has expressed a similar view, suggesting Sickert possessed an eerie ability to obtain from

¹³⁷ This engagement was a Church Parade Service held at All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower on St David's Day, 1st March 1936.

¹³⁸ Baron Max Aitken Beaverbrook, *Courage: The Story of James Dunn*, London: Collins, 1962, p. 250.

seemingly ordinary photographs a hidden story alluding to the future. Baron writes, ‘With uncanny prescience, Sickert captured a moment in history in each portrait; the wary vulnerability of the King presaged his abdication a few months later; the dejection of Aloisi presaged the collapse of co-operation between Italy, France and Great Britain and helped prepare the ground for the Second World War.’¹³⁹

Sickert’s process of painting the fleeting imagery of photojournalism transforms the meaning and/or significance of the original photographic images. Press photographs inhabit the frantic fast-paced world of reportage, their role in newspapers is to capture viewers’ attention and illustrate the accompanying articles. As quickly as they gain the reader’s attention they are dismissed just as fast once the page is turned. Painting directly from press photographs was, then, a twofold act undertaken by Sickert. First, he encourages viewers to observe an instantaneous moment longer than is possible when viewing such a moment directly in real life. Second, he encourages viewers to look longer at press photographs than they normally would when reading newspapers. Prolonging the viewing time, and isolating the image from its original context; the news story, gives viewers space to reflect on the image, thereby allowing for deeper or imaginative interpretations to emerge. Corbett seems to acknowledge this aspect of Sickert’s practice, claiming that Sickert appeared to be rebelling against Walter Benjamin’s notion of individual artworks’ losing their aura due to photography’s potential to rapidly mass-reproduce them. In Corbett’s opinion, Sickert used examples of mass-produced

¹³⁹ Baron, *Sickert: Paintings and Drawings*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 119. The second of Sickert’s portraits that Baron mentions is that of *Il Barone Aloisi* (1936), an Italian diplomat torn between his advocacy of the League of Nations and Mussolini’s intentions to invade Abyssinia. The painting was painted from a press photograph depicting Aloisi being fare-welled by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden after a failed conference on Abyssinia. Again Sickert changed the photograph’s imagery in the final painting, cropping out Eden to instead focus solely on the defeated demeanour of Aloisi. Mussolini’s subsequent invasion lead to Aloisi’s retirement, which as Baron suggests, Sickert seemed to foresee in the creation of his portrait. See Baron, *Sickert: Paintings and Drawings*, p. 540. Shone also views Sickert’s portrait as a misguided political statement based on Sickert’s fond attachment to Italy, since Sickert depicts Aloisi’s figure in front of a Venetian cityscape. See Shone, *Sickert Paintings*, p. 336.

culture, such as newspaper photographs, to reinstate the aura or uniqueness of the single artwork.¹⁴⁰

Sickert eternalised the transient images of photojournalism. In the media world, press photographs supported the articles they accompanied, providing visual evidence of King George V's presence at the race track or King Edward VIII's attendance at an official event. However Sickert went beyond these demonstrative qualities by isolating the image from its original context. In doing so, Sickert draws our attention to details that express the Kings' characters and circumstances, creating visual accounts that portray their human qualities rather than asserting their regal status. For Sickert, press photographs were a useful resource, providing artists with a greater freedom in which to explore the lives and personalities of public figures. Sickert identified, in the unguarded moments of press photographs, unique insights into famous peoples' lives; insights that give us a glimpse of their humanity and dominates over notions of idealism.

CONCLUSION

Photography is often considered as a medium that aids memory. In the paintings of Vuillard, Bonnard and Sickert, photographs were useful in the retrieval and representation of memories. Yet the relationship between memory and photography is not as straight-forward as it first appears to be. Instead there exist vital differences in how memories are remembered in the mind and portrayed within photographs. Photography's perceived objective and truthful nature can interfere with the emotional and imaginative processes of the mind, as Vuillard and Bonnard both seemed to realise. These qualities of photography can also challenge the restrictions of official portraiture, providing fresh perspectives of important figures, demonstrated by Sickert's use of press photographs as study aids.

¹⁴⁰ Corbett, *Walter Sickert*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 61.

At first Vuillard seemed swept up with the memory craze associated with amateur photography, reflected in the nostalgic tone of the Villeneuve panels. By the time Vuillard painted the Bibesco panels he seemed to be questioning photography's role within the memory process, providing an alternative vision of reality that mirrored the recreation of memories within the mind rather than how they appeared in photographs. In the Bibesco panels, Vuillard reinstated the various emotional experiences and imaginative qualities of the memory process, which photography's clarity threatened to restrict and demystify.

The emotional component of an experience was also important to Bonnard. Initially photographs served him well as study aids, yet as time passed the camera's objective perspective seemed to be at odds with the subjective accounts visually experienced and remembered by Bonnard's mind. It was this discrepancy that most likely drove Bonnard to abandon photography altogether. However Bonnard's paintings exhibit a limited view of Marthe, echoing photography's representation of memories. In the later paintings, Marthe is no longer an individual entity, but reduced to a figment of Bonnard's initial desire.

In contrast to Vuillard and Bonnard, Sickert used photography to help him represent a certain veracity that was not often present in official portraiture. Sickert's sourcing of subject matter directly from newspaper photographs challenged the conventions of official portraiture and the level of control these conventions imposed upon creative freedom. Unhindered by such restrictions, press photographs exposed expressions and scenarios not generally depicted in official portraiture. Sickert adopted the candid and informal visual language of press photographs as he strived to free his artistic vision from portraiture's restrictions. In doing so, he highlighted an alternative visual language in the remembrance of public figures whilst eternalising the fleeting imagery of photojournalism.

All three artists commented on the complications associated with the representation of memories, whether in photographs or in paintings. Vuillard's and Bonnard's paintings suggested that the clarity of photographs were not always conducive to representing the emotive and fluid nature of our memories, whilst Sickert recognised the restrictive view painters, and patrons, could enforce on public memory. The storage of memories within our minds means they are subject to change, making it difficult to accurately represent them visually. Even photography's invention could not provide us with clarity; their static portrayals dominate our perceptions, often denying the various emotive factors of human experience. It is the role of the human agent in forming and recollecting memories that dictates how we remember the past: a factor acknowledged by Vuillard, Bonnard and Sickert.

KEEPING UP WITH TIME: ANALYSING TIME, MOTION AND THE VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Innovations in the nineteenth-century, such as the railroad and the telegraph, lessened the gulf between far divided locations. The era's obsession with speed was also present in photography; technological developments and experiment made it possible for photographers to render motion and spontaneous moments of life. Rebecca Solnit groups these photographic developments with that of the railroad and the telegraph, for they allowed people, ideas and sentiments to travel faster than previous methods of transportation and communication services.¹⁴¹ The development of faster photographic techniques made it possible, for the first time in human history, to understand the finer visual mechanics of motion. In their static forms, photographs present motion halted at fractions of a second; revealing sights that usually are unperceivable by the naked human eye. Photography during this period joined other ocular instruments, such as the microscope and the telescope, in extending our visual experiences beyond the eye's natural ability.

Numerous experiments with photography and motion occurred during the nineteenth-century with the two most notable figures in the field being Anglo-American photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, and French scientist, Etienne-Jules Marey. Muybridge's series of photographs, depicting the chronological movements of a trotting horse, called *Occident*, were the first photographic experiments to present halted moments of motion. Throughout the 1870's and 1880's, Muybridge continued to photograph the sequential phases of motion in both animals and humans (Fig. 44). Muybridge's photographic series, *The Horse in Motion*, featured widely in European and North American publications from 1878 to 1879. Following this was the publication of Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion* in 1887, which spawned two abridged versions, *Animals in Motion* (1899) and *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901).

¹⁴¹ Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*, New York: Viking, 2003, pp. 18-19.

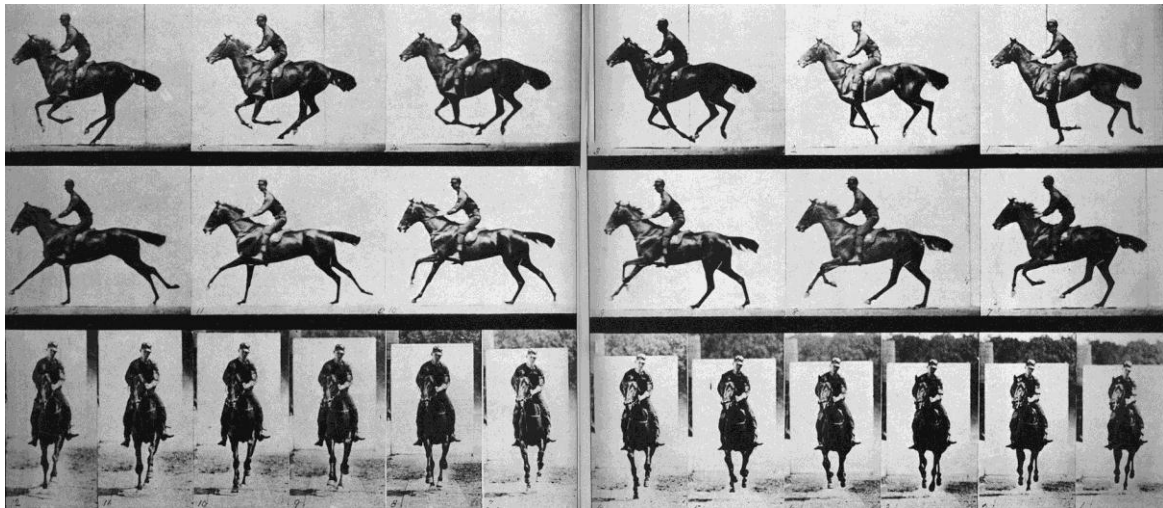


Fig. 44, Muybridge, *Bouquet with Rider* (0.33 second), 1879.

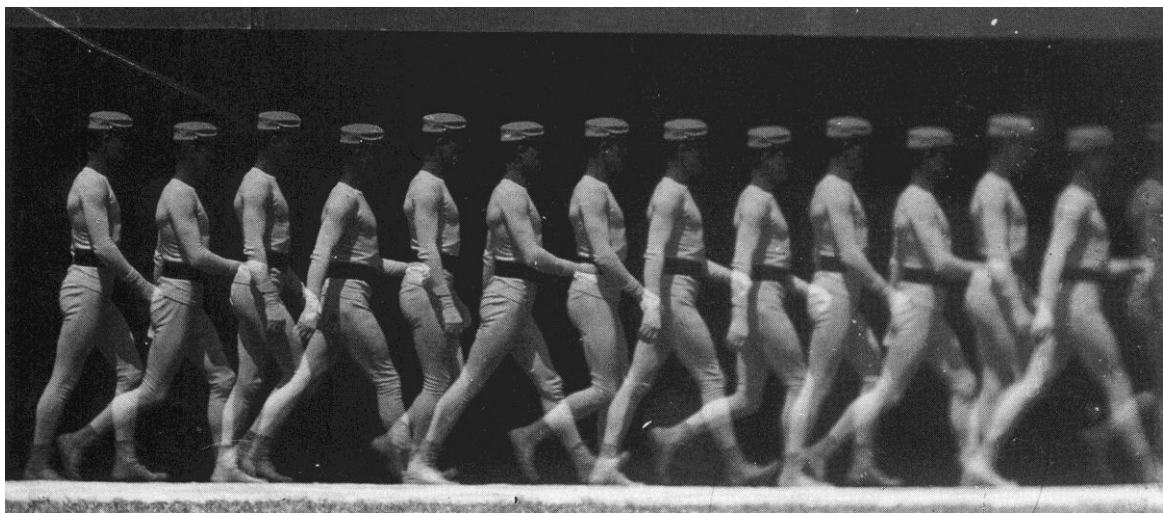


Fig. 45, Marey, *Schenkel Walk*, 1886.

Marey, with his longstanding interest in understanding motion,¹⁴² was inspired by Muybridge's photographic experiments he viewed in *The Horse in Motion*. However Marey grew concerned that specific moments of the subject's motion were lost between the photographic frames of Muybridge's series. Undertaking his own photographic experiments, Marey expanded on Muybridge's efforts by recording the entire sequence of a subject's movements within a single photographic frame known as the chronophotograph (Fig. 45). Marey's experiments also contributed to the development of motion cinema, which brothers

¹⁴² Marey's background was that of a doctor, specialising in physiology. He was interested in recording, and making visible, the internal motions of the body. By the late 1850's Marey had invented an instrument that recorded the heart's beat as a continuous undulating line on a graph, enabling doctors to analyse the heart's rhythms. See Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, New York and London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 72-75.

Auguste and Louis Lumière had produced the earliest examples of by the end of the nineteenth-century.

Even though these photographic experiments were undertaken in the interest of scientific research, both Muybridge and Marey recognised the potential their experiments held for artists.¹⁴³ For Marey photography was an effective study aid to help artists depict motion. He wrote,

The difficulty artists find in representing men or animals in action is explained when we realize that the most skilled observers declare themselves incapable of seizing the successive phases of locomotive movements. To this end, photochronography seems called to render services to art as it does to science, since it analyzes the most rapid and most complicated movements.¹⁴⁴

Prior to photography's invention, time expressed in painting was static and staged, representing a created moment sourced from the artist's imagination or a constructed scene. Even paintings depicting the height of action still appear static, evident in Nicolas Poussin's *The Abduction of the Sabine Women* (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46, Poussin, *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*, c.1633-34.

Poussin's attention to detail, repetition of figures' poses and the still background all contribute to the artificial nature of the scene. The painting's horizontal construction evokes

¹⁴³ Muybridge's motion studies of humans seemed to go beyond scientific investigation; it is possible he may have created them specifically as artistic studies. As Tim Cresswell notes, these photographic studies were driven by gender stereotypes, with Muybridge's studies of women in motion corresponding to the conventions of Academic painting, specifically that of Orientalism. See Cresswell, pp. 64-69. For a further discussion on Muybridge's scientific credibility in regards to his photographic studies of women, see Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 247-251.

¹⁴⁴ Etienne-Jules Marey, 'Représentation des attitudes de la locomotion humaine au moyen des figures en relief', CRAS 106, 1888, pp. 1635-1636, quoted in Braun, pp. 267-268.

the physical layout of the theatre stage, further reinforcing the painting's staged effect. When painters tried to depict motion, such as the galloping horse, their limited knowledge of the precise mechanics of movement prevailed. In Géricault's *The Derby* (Fig. 47) the race horses are rendered inaccurately as their legs are stretched out in front of and behind their bodies in an unnatural manner. Again the scene presents itself straight on to the viewer with a strong horizontal composition that, along with the repetitive poses of the horses, heightens the static tone of the painting.

The photographic developments of the nineteenth-century also triggered an interest, within artists, to experiment and comment on the nature of time in relation to the visual experience. Two prominent artists who did so were Degas and Bonnard. These two were both



Fig. 47, Géricault, *The Derby*, 1821.

interested in experimenting with time in both the mediums of painting and photography, however expressing this shared interest differently within their artworks. Degas went against the grain of contemporaneous photography, rejecting the instantaneous method of snapshot photography to instead maintain the slower production process of photography's earlier years. Bonnard embraced the instantaneous snapshot camera, which allowed him to record candid moments that occurred in his domestic surroundings.

Both Degas' and Bonnard's exposure to photography, and its methodology, had an impact on their respective painting practices. Photography's developments, in regards to depicting motion, seemed to inspire Degas to experiment with painting his figures mid-action, giving these paintings an energetic air. Bonnard's earlier paintings also represent these instantaneous moments of time. After experimenting with photography, time in Bonnard's paintings began

to slow down as his later work depicts still and reflective scenarios that contrast with the fleeting joyous moments of his photographs.

PRESENTING PHOTOGRAPHIC TIME

Degas and Bonnard both experimented with photography in an era when technological advancements had sped up the photographic process, creating a new expression of time within visual representation; that of the instantaneous moment. Snapshot photography quickly emerged as a popular hobby and photographic genre during the 1890's. Despite this popular development, Degas held steadfast to the slower techniques of earlier professional photography when he began experimenting with the medium in the mid 1890's. Time expressed in Degas' photographs remains slow and static, comparable to the staged moments in painting. Bonnard, who began photographing towards the end of the century, immersed himself in the growing trend of snapshot photography. His photographs depict fast instantaneous moments, demonstrating the constant motion of life. Despite his camera's limited settings, Bonnard's photographs still display a proficient and artful approach that distinguishes his efforts from the general approach of the amateur photographer.

Degas' Created Moments

For Degas photography was another medium to experiment with and express his artistic concerns. He showed little interest in capturing the fleeting moments of life associated with snapshot photography. Instead, Degas created his own photographic moments which required lengthy exposure times of minutes, rather than seconds, due to his complicated lighting setups and compositions. When Degas photographed people they had to remain still for minutes on end in order for their forms to retain a sharp definition in the final photograph. As a result, Degas' photographs exude a static and still atmosphere, his sitters obviously holding a pose

instead of being photographed engaged in the fluid motion of life, evident in Bonnard's snapshots.

While it remains uncertain the precise camera model Degas used, what is clear was that Degas preferred to exercise complete control over the final outcome of his photographs; something that the limited settings of the compact amateur cameras did not allow to the same extent. When these compact cameras first emerged in 1888, they harboured the latest innovation in photographic development, using roll film in place of glass plates, allowing for their compact size and ease of handling. However their minimal settings, small viewfinders and the newly formed photographic laboratories (established to process amateur cameras' roll films) meant that these new cameras denied the photographer maximum control over the outcome of their photographs. By contrast, Degas used cameras that took glass plates, which he developed himself and had his trusted printers, Guillaume Tasset and his daughter Delphine, print; although with specific instructions from Degas.¹⁴⁵ The gelatin dry plates Degas used and the size of his cameras – initially he had a camera that took 8 x 10 cm plates but appeared to have replaced this with a camera that took 9 x 12 cm plates¹⁴⁶ – made it likely that Degas owned either a small stand camera or a folding handheld camera. Both could take photographs without the aid of a tripod since the gelatin dry plate, itself a recent development in photography, was capable of recording a scene at a faster shutter speed than previous dry and wet plate processes. The likelihood that he owned such a camera was also suggested by Degas in a letter to Ludovic Halévy. He wrote, 'One day I shall burst in on you, with my camera in my hand.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ See Newhall, Trans. 'Degas: Amateur Photographer: Eight Unpublished Letters by the Famous Painter Written on a Photographic Vacation', *Image*, Vol. 5, No. 6, June 1956, pp. 124-126.

¹⁴⁶ In two of the letters Degas wrote to Tasset he mentioned that he would like a camera that could take 9 x 12 cm plates. The specific gelatin dry plates he preferred to use did not come in a 8 x 10 cm size that his current camera took. Of those gelatin dry plates that have survived, from October of 1895 (roughly two months after he wrote those letters) they start to measure 9 x 12 cm, suggesting Degas obtained the new camera he desired.

¹⁴⁷ Degas, Monday 29th September 1895, *Letters*, p.196.

Since some of Degas' photographs have been destroyed or lost, it is unclear whether he ever utilised his camera in a candid and spontaneous manner (providing the cameras he owned were the ones mentioned above). Degas' camera offered more settings than the compact roll film camera, demonstrated by his ability to command a finer degree of control over the final outcomes of his photographs. Less was left to chance, although due to the restrictive and sensitive nature of photography mistakes were unavoidable.¹⁴⁸

From the surviving photographs, what we can deduce was that control was of higher importance to Degas than the faster speeds that the new developments in photography offered. As he said of snapshot photography, 'Speed, speed, is there nothing more stupid?'¹⁴⁹ Degas' photographic practice was a highly controlled and slow procedure; the majority of his photographic sessions were located indoors so he could obtain full control over his environment, a desire also expressed in his paintings as interior scenes form a large bulk of Degas' work. Most of Degas' surviving photographs are portraits of his friends, whom he demanded not only their time but their complete obedience. A fair number of these surviving portraits were taken in the residence of Ludovic and Louise Halévy, where through their son Daniel's journal entries we gain precious insight into Degas' photographic practice. Halévy wrote,

They returned together and from then on the *pleasure* part of the evening was over. Degas raised his voice, became dictatorial, gave orders that a lamp be brought into the little salon and that anyone who wasn't going to pose should leave. The *duty* part of the evening began. We had to obey Degas's fierce will, his artist's ferocity. At the moment all his friends speak of him with terror. If you invite him for the evening you know what to expect: two hours of military obedience.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ See Newhall, 'Degas: Amateur Photographer'.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Parry, p. 65.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Halévy in his journal 29th December 1895, quoted in Daniel, p. 31. Italics in source material.

Halévy's journal extract emphasises Degas' attitude to photography, considering it a serious activity that his sitters must also take seriously. However Halévy also indicates how Degas'



Fig. 48, Degas, *Jacques-Émile and Rose Blanche*, 1895.

photographic session was a specific segment of time separated from the course of ordinary events. Halévy refers to two periods of time; the *pleasure* part (dinner and socialising) and the *duty* part (Degas' photographic session). These two parts of the evening were clearly separate from one another with their respective atmospheres: that of pleasure, enjoyment and socialisation versus duty, obedience and trepidation. Degas did not situate his photographic practice within the fluid ever-changing realm of daily life; instead he created a specific moment in time for his photographic sessions.



Fig. 49, Mengs, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, 1760-61.

Within this allocated period, Degas' expression of time was not a natural progression but a staged event where his sitters acted out their movements heavily influenced by his direction. Degas' sitters appear obviously posed as depicted in *Jacques-Émile and Rose Blanche* (Fig. 48). Jacques-Émile sits with his body hunched over to his right, his chin resting in the palm of his right hand, giving his demeanour a

reflective tone. Rose sits hunched forward with her hands clasped in front of her as she looks towards Jacques-Émile. The Blanches' poses hints at a narrative; Rose's apprehensive posture suggests she is waiting for the contemplatively posed Jacques-Émile to reach a

solution to a problem. Their body language sets the emotional timbre of the scene, which aids the narrative, a technique long used in Academic painting. In Anton Raphael Mengs' painting, *Augustus and Cleopatra* (Fig. 49), the body language of the two figures contribute to our understanding of the overall narrative; that of Augustus' visit to Cleopatra after Mark Anthony's death. Augustus walks towards Cleopatra with his arm extended and a gentle expression on his face, indicating he has come to offer Cleopatra his sympathy and condolences. Cleopatra bends down in grief and gratitude, her arm also reaches out, indicating to the viewers she is open to accepting Augustus' condolences, who was Mark Anthony's rival. A certain degree of emotion is also expressed in Meng's painting, but remains restrained as typical of the Academic tradition. Degas asserted a similar degree of restrained emotion in the Blanches' poses, keeping in tune with Academic conventions. Both images express time as a created moment, where it is evident that both artists manipulated their subjects' mannerisms and gestures in order to suggest a certain narrative and emotional tone.



Fig. 50, Barnes, *The Apotheosis of Degas*, 1885.

Degas demonstrated his tendency to stage a scene for a photograph well before he acquired his own camera equipment. In 1885, whilst on holiday in Dieppe, Degas employed Barnes to photograph him and his companions. One of these photographs, *The Apotheosis of Degas* (Fig. 50), was choreographed by Degas and features him seated in the centre of the composition with the

three Lemoine sisters standing behind him, representing the three muses, and the two Halévy boys seated either side of Degas in the role of choir boys. This compositional construction of a group of figures positioned around a central figure evokes the created

moment of religious paintings, particularly those painted during the Renaissance. The *sacre conversazioni*, or the sacred conversation, was a motif that emerged during the Renaissance, featuring a central figure, the Virgin Mary and child, surrounded by saints and donors. *The Apotheosis of Degas* is both aesthetically and thematically comparable to these paintings. Palma Vecchio's *Madonna with Sts Barbara and Christina, and Two Donors* (Fig. 51), for example, depicts the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in the centre of the scene, two saints, Barbara and Christina, stand next to her and two male donors sit either side of her. Both Vecchio and Degas have posed their figures straight on to the viewer in a manner similar to a scene viewed on the theatre stage. Degas also employs the symmetrical construction of the *sacre conversazioni*, a contrived formation that also



Fig. 51, Vecchio, *Madonna with Sts Barbara and Christina, and Two Donors*, 1510-20.

highlights the static nature of these works, making these scenes appear obviously posed and further removed from the candid nature of real life. The comparison to the theatre is also noted by Parry, who views Degas' controlling and considered manner in the creation of Barnes' photograph as comparable to the role of a stage director.¹⁵¹

The Apotheosis of Degas was a parody of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827), which depicts the great artists of history surrounding the central figure of Homer. However the religious tone of Barnes' photograph has more in common with the narratives of Renaissance painting; a period Degas was all too familiar with from his travels and studies in Italy during the early years of his career. Degas' directorial response was then an attempt to align the young medium of photography with the enduring conventions of Western painting. Whilst Degas portrayed the staged mannerisms of Renaissance and

¹⁵¹ Parry, p. 61.

Academic paintings in his photographs, his representation of the constructed moment was not an endeavour to express a certain ideology. Instead, Degas' directorial approach allowed him to express the various characteristics and personalities of those who inhabited his social circle.

Degas' firm and controlling grasp derived from an intention to successfully express the personalities and mannerisms of his sitters. Most of the individuals who feature in Degas' portraits – both paintings and photographs – were people Degas knew well, such as family members, friends and acquaintances. Antoine Terrasse states that Degas' photographs have little in common with his paintings,¹⁵² however the photographs that Degas created in the private residences of his friends' challenges Terrasse's claim. Degas' slow and highly authoritative photographic approach mirrored his slow and precise attitude to painting, in both mediums Degas' methodology served to represent the various personalities of his friends and family. In his photograph, *Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé* (Fig. 52), Degas' highly controlled approach produced an image that gives viewers an impression of the personalities belonging to Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé. For Valéry this photograph showcased well the likeness of Degas' sitters; in particular Mallarmé's. 'This masterpiece of its kind involved the use of nine oil lamps . . . and a fearful quarter-hour of immobility for the subjects. It has the finest likeness of Mallarmé', Valéry wrote, 'The result was worth this martyrdom. No portrait could be more delicate, more *spiritually* like, that one.'¹⁵³

Degas' posing of Renoir and Mallarmé seems to reflect their personalities and for Parry their poses personify their respective eras and the ideals associated with those epochs.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Terrasse, 'Portraits: Painting and Photography', *Degas Portraits*, Eds. Felix Baumann and Marianne Karabelnik, London: Merrell Holberton, 1994, p. 309.

¹⁵³ Valéry, p. 40.

¹⁵⁴ Parry, pp. 69-70.

Mallarmé, with closed eyes, looks inward, representing the inward looking nature of such latter nineteenth-century movements as Symbolism and the Nabis. In contrast, Renoir stares straight at the camera's lens, indicating the importance of one's visual experience of the exterior world associated with Impressionism, a pose Parry also recognises as representative of the ideals of Second Empire France.¹⁵⁵ Renoir and Mallarmé's commitment to remain still for the long duration of fifteen minutes suggests their level of devotion towards Degas, also demonstrated by other members of Degas' social circle who submitted themselves to his strict instruction. Degas' relationships with his sitters was twofold, not only did Degas need to know his sitters well in order to express their personalities, his sitters also had to possess a certain level of endearment and respect towards the artist to be willing to obey his rigorous demands.

Degas' attention to detail was a feature long asserted in his portrait paintings. In *M. And Mme Edmondo Morbilli* (Fig. 53) Degas rendered the personalities and the relationship of his sister Thérèse and her husband Edmondo through their body language. Thérèse appears apprehensive as she stares wide-eyed at the viewer, her right hand drawn up to her face supporting her chin whilst her left hand is placed tentatively on Edmondo's right shoulder. Whereas Edmondo assumes an authoritative stance with his figure dominating the pictorial space, looking at the viewer with a steely gaze and pursed lips. For Henri Loyrette the couple's poses indicates the nature of their relationship and the clearly defined roles that existed within their marriage.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁵⁶ Henri Loyrette compares the couple's poses in *M. And Mme Edmondo Morbilli* with an earlier portrait Degas painted of the couple; also titled *M. And Mme. Edmondo Morbilli* (c.1863). The earlier portrait, painted not long after the Morbilli's marriage, presents a different dynamic between the couple. Thérèse assumes a more dominant position to her husband, suggesting her identity is not yet consumed by that of her husband's. See Jean Sutherland Boggs, Ed. *Degas*, New York and Ottawa: Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Gallery of Canada, 1988, p. 118.



Fig. 52, Degas, *Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1895.

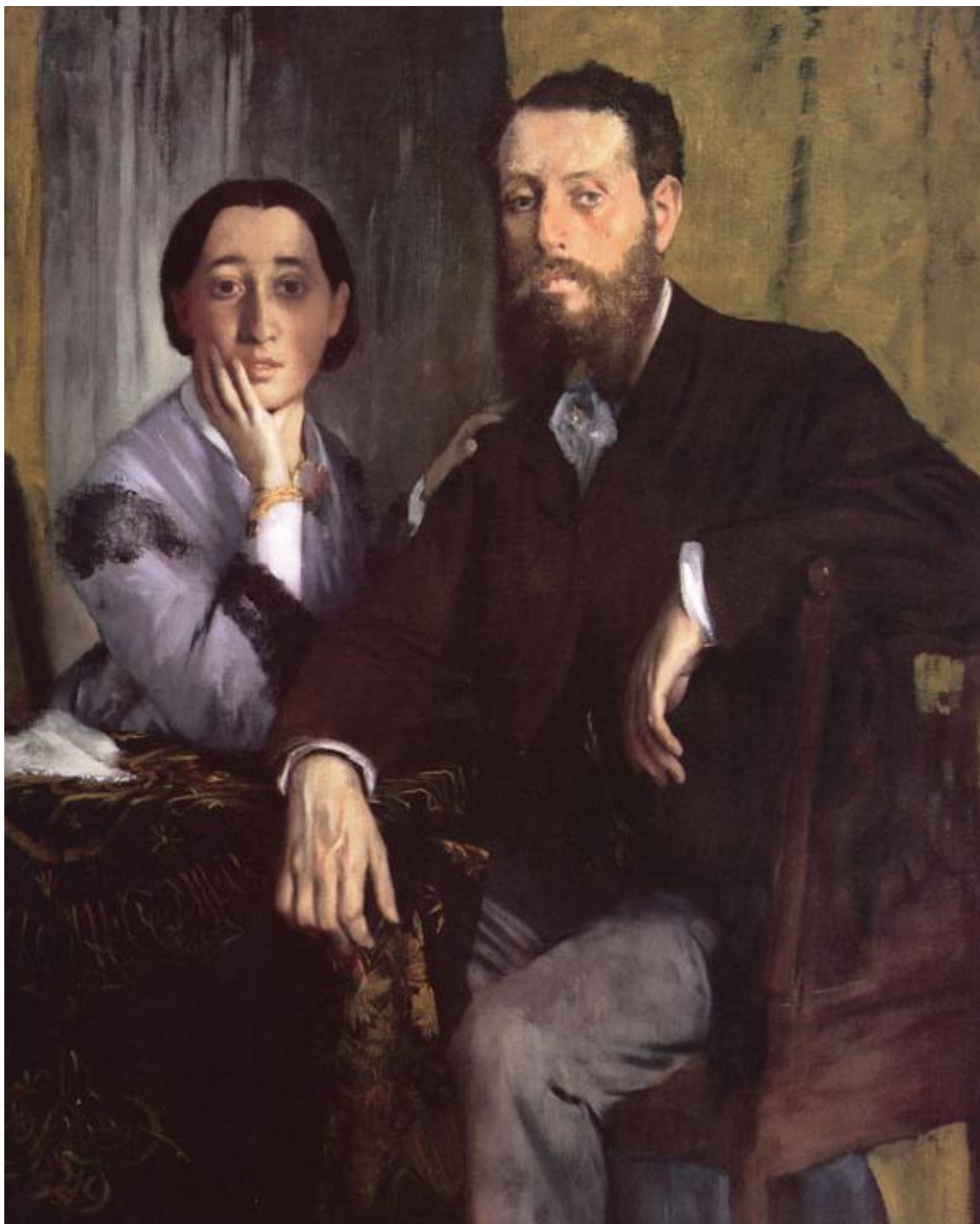


Fig. 53, Degas, *M. and Mme Edmondo Morbilli*, 1865.

Time, in both painting and photography, was an important consideration for Degas. However this notion of time extended beyond the period required to create his artworks, to also include the time spent by Degas in getting to know his sitters. Degas' technique contrasted with the creative process associated with the instantaneous moment of snapshot photography. These static highly posed portraits were part of an endeavour to express his sitters' characteristics. Degas' dictatorial style, as described by Daniel Halévy, can be explained by his desire to depict his sitters in poses that represent their personalities and their relationships to other people within the images. Terrasse writes of Degas' painted portraits, 'He was a subtle psychologist, interested not only in the character expressed by a face, but beyond the physiognomy, some peculiarity in a familiar attitude or gesture.'¹⁵⁷

Commenting on his painting efforts whilst visiting family in New Orleans, Degas wrote, 'And then nothing but a really long stay can reveal the customs of a people, that is to say their charm. – Instantaneousness is photography, nothing more.'¹⁵⁸ The latter part of this quote is often misused by writers to sum up Degas' overall attitude to photography.¹⁵⁹ Degas wrote this statement in 1872, well before he began his photographic experiments; a fact that should be considered when discussing Degas' attitude to photography.

Bonnard's Spontaneous Moments

Bonnard began experimenting with photography in the closing years of the nineteenth-century when amateur cameras, and snapshot photographs, had become a popular component of domestic life. Chéroux categorises Bonnard's photographic practice (along with fellow artists Vuillard, Maurice Denis and Félix Vallotton, to name a few) under the label of

¹⁵⁷ Terrasse, 'Portraits: Painting and Photography', p. 302.

¹⁵⁸ Degas, *Letters*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁹ See Varnedoe, 'The Ideology of Time', p. 96.

dilettantes.¹⁶⁰ This term Chéroux employs to describe photographers who had little interest in technical matters or experimenting artistically with the medium. In Chéroux's view, photography was for Bonnard (and the other artists Chéroux names) a means to record life and engage in the memory process.¹⁶¹

Looking at Bonnard's photographs, one does get the impression that he was, indeed, less concerned with the technical side of photography. Bonnard's photographs show candid and



Fig. 54, Bonnard, *The Dining Room in the Country*, 1913.



Fig. 55, Bonnard, *Robert and Renée in a Cart*, 1903-04.

spontaneous moments, products of his Pocket Kodak camera; a point and shoot amateur camera that allowed little opportunity for photographers to adjust and experiment with the camera's settings. However Chéroux's claim that Bonnard's photographic practice was driven predominately by a desire to create

memories exclusive of aesthetic concerns is debatable. Perhaps Chéroux's viewpoint is motivated by the striking differences between Bonnard's paintings and his photographs; especially in the different moods they express. Formal aspects of snapshot photography did find their way into some of Bonnard's paintings; for

example, Marthe's off-centre position in *The Dining Room in the Country* (Fig. 54) echoes the asymmetrical compositions of snapshot photographs, evident in Bonnard's *Robert and Renée* (Fig. 55). However the energetic photographic accounts of Bonnard's social life do

¹⁶⁰ Chéroux, 'A Sense of Context: Amateur Photography in the Late Nineteenth Century', pp. 41-42.

¹⁶¹ Chéroux includes Vuillard within this group of photographers; however, Vuillard's inclusion is debatable. Whilst Vuillard did have a limited interest in the technical aspects of photography, and used a snapshot Kodak camera to record candid moments, he also utilized his camera in a creative manner that relates to his early paintings. For a more in-depth discussion see the first chapter of this thesis, pp. 33-39.

differ to the quiet and reflective moments often portrayed in Bonnard's paintings. This factor could be attributed to the differences between the creative processes of painting and photography, and the fact that his Pocket Kodak camera afforded him an opportunity to experiment with and express his experience of time.



Fig. 56, Bonnard, *Bathing*, c.1903.

Bonnard's camera, the Pocket Kodak model of 1896, had the dimensions of 2.9 x 2.25 x 3.9 inches. These small dimensions made the camera easy to hold, allowing Bonnard to manoeuvre around the scene to quickly capture different perspectives. The camera was also unobtrusive; an important feature for it meant that Bonnard could discreetly photograph without disturbing his subjects' movements and the natural flow of time. Bonnard's photographs represent slices of life which, despite the still nature of the photograph, express a lively and dynamic atmosphere. In *Bathing* (Fig. 56) Bonnard successfully captured the energetic movements of children frolicking in a swimming pool. Looking at this photograph,

one gets the sense that life does not stand still but is in constant flux. Bonnard managed to suspend a segment of time, yet this was all reliant on his own skill as a photographer since his subjects never stood still for him; instead they carried on leading their lives. Bonnard's photographs make the viewer aware that there is a before and after to the single moment present in the photograph. The splashing actions of the two figures in the background, that occurred just prior to the photographed moment, are suggested by the water that rises and remains suspended in mid-air. Whereas the future is represented by the blurry boy on the left, who moves towards a point just outside the photograph's frame. Bonnard made no attempt to control time; instead stood witness to the unravelling moments of life, his camera at the ready. We can obtain a glimpse of Bonnard's

method from one of Vuillard's photographs, *Bonnard Photographing Renée with Roussel Seen from Behind, and Another Little Girl, Le Grand-Lemps* (Fig. 57). In Vuillard's photograph Bonnard stands to the left whilst Renée stands in front of him, her head turned to face Roussel as he walks towards her. Bonnard stands by, his posture hunched



Fig. 57, Vuillard, *Bonnard Photographing Renée with Roussel Seen from Behind, and Another Little Girl, Le Grand-Lemps*, detail, 1900.

forward armed with his camera in front of him, anticipating the impending interaction between Roussel and Renée and its potential for an interesting photographic moment.

Bonnard's technique brings to mind Cartier-Bresson's notion of 'the decisive moment'. Time is an important element in the creation of 'the decisive moment'; this term describing the instant when all the necessary aesthetic elements needed for a dynamic photograph collide. According to Cartier-Bresson what makes photography stand out from the other plastic arts is

that photographers must work more closely with the rhythms of time in order to capture the ‘decisive moment’. Cartier-Bresson writes,

In photography there is a new kind of plasticity, the product of instantaneous lines made by movement as though it were a presentiment of the way in which life itself unfolds. But inside movement there is one moment at which the elements in motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment and hold immobile the equilibrium of it.¹⁶²

Bonnard seized upon ‘the decisive moment’, possessing an uncanny talent for capturing a single moment of time that depicts this important balance that Cartier-Bresson describes. *Claude Terrasse and Henri Jacotot Wrestling* (Fig. 58) is just one of numerous examples that show-cases Bonnard’s photographic ability. In the photograph, Jacotot is frozen mid-action as he is about to drop Terrasse onto the ground. Both Bonnard’s timing and perspective



Fig. 58, Bonnard, *Claude Terrasse and Henri Jacotot Wrestling*, c.1902-03.

contribute to the visually strong nature of the image. Bonnard stood behind the wrestling men, whose heads are obscured due to Bonnard’s angle and the position of their downward

¹⁶² Cartier-Bresson, pp. 32-33.

descending bodies. They appear as two headless beings, a tangle of white flesh and limbs against the dark foliage background.

Bonnard's consideration of time, and his consistent proficiency at anticipating and recording action, exceeded the general expectations of the amateur point and shoot photographer. Referring back to Chéroux's inclusion of Bonnard within the category of *dilettante*, it now seems that Chéroux was perhaps too hasty in his judgment. It is true that Bonnard did not exhibit nearly the same degree of interest in the entire photographic process as Degas, especially in regards to technical matters. However Bonnard's artistic interest in the medium is a more contentious issue than first thought. Whilst Bonnard's photographic works share the spontaneous candid nature associated with snapshot photographs, his photographic technique expresses a deeper experimental element. Instead of experimenting with elaborate lighting set-ups and staged arrangements, Bonnard experimented with time and motion. Even though it appears that Bonnard did not bestow the same value to his photographic works as to his paintings,¹⁶³ his photographs of fleeting moments represented what photography during the last decade of the nineteenth-century had become capable of; the ability to quickly halt time to present incidental moments vulnerable to being lost and overlooked during life's constant state of flux.

¹⁶³ Bonnard's thoughts on photography and his own work remain largely unknown for the artist rarely commented on the medium. In the exhibition essay for 'Vuillard et son Kodak', Salomon does mention a conversation he had with Bonnard on colour photography. See Salomon, p. 3. However, as Bonnard made numerous comments on painting it could be assumed that Bonnard possibly did not take his photographic endeavours as seriously as his painting. Kahng speculates that Bonnard may have possibly exhibited caution in his attitude towards photography, fearing that any serious comment could jeopardise his reputation as a painter. Whether this was the case or whether Bonnard viewed photography merely as a hobby is hard to determine, as Kahng also acknowledges, due to the lack of commentary from Bonnard. See Kahng, pp. 239-240. Comments made later on in his life, on the differences between the visual experiences of the eye and the camera lens, suggests that Bonnard did not prescribe the same value to photography as he did to painting. I discuss this in more depth on pp. 127-128.

REPRESENTING PAINTED TIME

The expression of time and motion within Degas' and Bonnard's paintings contrasts with their photographic experiments. Degas' highly co-ordinated photographic scenes created a static representation of time, generally viewed in paintings and, indeed, also a feature within Degas' paintings. Yet with the photographic developments of the mid-nineteenth century, Degas' paintings began to depict faster instances of time, usually associated with the snapshot photograph. Bonnard's experiments with photography helped him develop an awareness of the differences between photography's and painting's relationship with time. Paintings created during, and after, Bonnard's period of photographic experimentation exhibit slower accounts of time than depicted in his earlier paintings. Differing to his photographs, Bonnard's later paintings portray quiet and still scenes, encouraging viewers' gazes to linger longer within the pictorial space.

Degas' Instantaneous Scenes

By the end of the 1870's Degas had refined his technique of portraying the instantaneous moment, an expression of time that would feature heavily in his paintings for the rest of his career. Motion in Degas' earlier paintings retained the staged nature of the Academic tradition that Degas was trained within.¹⁶⁴ His painting, *Dance Class at the Opéra* (Fig. 59), depicts the modern theme of the ballet; however the strong horizontal composition mirrors the compositional techniques used in Academic painting. Jacques-Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii* (Fig. 60) shows the figures positioned horizontally across the painting, set against a backdrop of classical columns and archways also running horizontally across. Time in both the *Dance Class at the Opéra* and *The Oath of the Horatii* is not expressed as a segmented

¹⁶⁴ Degas was trained by Academician painter, Louis Lamothe, himself a pupil of Ingres'. In 1885 Lamothe presented Degas to the École des Beaux-Arts where Degas secured a place at the school to study in the painting and sculpture department.

moment plucked from life's ever-changing course of events, instead time is expressed as a specifically created moment.

Gustave Coquiot considered *Dance Class at the Opéra* to possess the properties vital for a successful photograph, not a painting. 'All these dancers, in this vast bare room, form what would make an excellent photograph, and nothing more. The picture is accurate, and frozen; it is well balanced, but a skilled photographer could easily have recorded the same scene.'¹⁶⁵ Coquiot's comparison of Degas' painting to a photograph emphasises the state of photography during this period, a medium that produced static accounts of life. Coquiot's quote indicates that the staged scenarios of conventional Academic paintings had been superseded by the advent of photography; painting was then required to present its subject matter in a fresh and innovative manner.



Fig. 59, Degas, *Dance Class at the Opéra*, 1872.



Fig. 60, David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1785.

Degas' earliest attempts at painting the ballet do appear static when compared to his later works. Time sped up as Degas painted his ballerinas suspended mid-dance in more dynamic compositions. In *The Green Dancer* (Fig. 61) Degas shifts the viewpoint from a horizontal straight-on perspective to an elevated view, lifting our gaze to hover above the ballerinas as they dance beneath us. By changing the perspective Degas bestows the painting with an

¹⁶⁵ Gustave Coquiot, *Degas*, Paris: Ollendorff, 1924, p. 169, quoted in Sutherland Boggs, *Degas*, p. 175.

energetic tone, emphasising the continuous flow of the ballet. How Degas cropped the scene also contributes to the painting's busy nature, producing a strong diagonal line comprising of the dancers' limbs, focusing viewers' attention on the ballerinas' movements.

Another factor concerning Degas' later work is his selection process for the moments he portrays. Degas painted his ballerinas during moments when their bodies were at their most

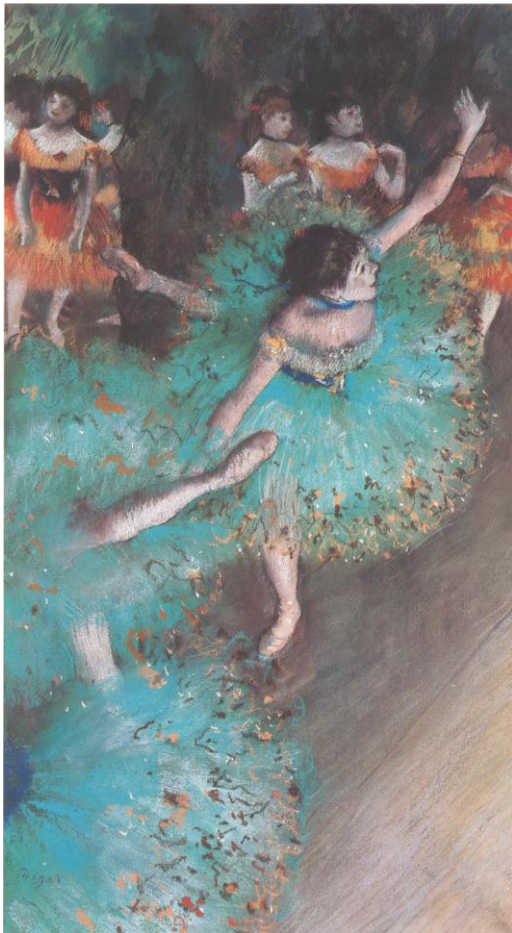


Fig. 61, Degas, *The Green Dancer*, c. 1880.

vulnerable from instability, giving his paintings a dramatic tension. He provided sights that differed dramatically from the staged scenarios of the popular mid-century photographic format, the *carte des visite*.¹⁶⁶ These commercially produced photographs of ballerinas presented them frozen in poses that emphasised the elegance and gracefulness of their lithe bodies. In contrast, *The Green Dancer's* strong diagonal composition shows the ballerinas' suspended during mid-dance, demonstrating the dizzying effects of motion whilst also highlighting the strain ballerinas' bodies endure. Degas presents an alternative view of the ballet as the precarious

poses of his frozen ballerinas do not express the graceful nature of ballet, instead illustrating the perilous conditions ballerinas submit their bodies to in order to entertain the audience.

¹⁶⁶ For further discussion on the differences between *carte des visites* and Degas' paintings, see Richard Kendall and Jill DeVoyner, *Degas and the Ballet: Picturing Movement*, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2011, pp. 31-33, 36-38.

Degas' representation of motion was driven by his interest in portraying the unstable and awkward positions the body assumes during the course of an action. This interest Degas expressed in his studies of the female nude, depicting the less strenuous activities of women grooming and bathing. By focusing on the unstable and awkward nature of a frozen moment of motion, Degas bestowed such physically undemanding acts as drying oneself or brushing one's hair a precarious tone. This is evident in a series of drawings and paintings, all titled *After the Bath* and created in 1896 (Fig. 62), which shows the same pose of a woman drying herself. In these images a woman leans against a chaise's headboard, resting on her right leg whilst she props herself up with her left leg. Her body leans to the right in an extreme manner, the creases in her upper back emphasises the woman's strange contortions. It was highly likely that Degas used a photographic aid to help him render this difficult and awkward pose. The photograph, taken by Degas,¹⁶⁷ *Nude Drying Herself* (Fig. 63), depicts a nude female figure assuming the same pose as the one in the *After the Bath* drawings and paintings. Photography seemed to be a useful resource for Degas, aiding him in painting the finer mechanics of motion; other examples of

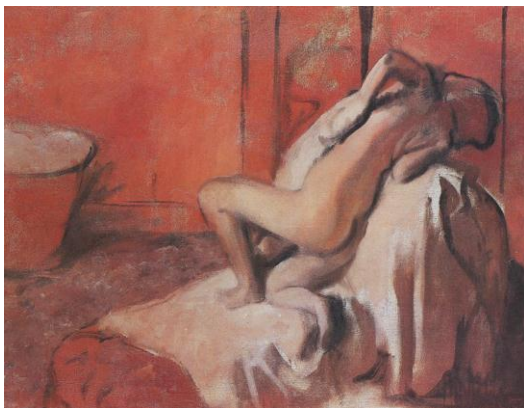


Fig. 62, Degas, *After the Bath*, 1896.



Fig. 63, Degas, *Nude Drying Herself*, c.1895-96.

¹⁶⁷ This photograph is usually attributed to Degas, however there is still some contention over whether Degas did actually take this photograph or not. See footnote 170, p.117.

Degas' artworks are strikingly similar to Muybridge's photographic experiments.¹⁶⁸

Due to the expressive body language depicted in *After the Bath*, Eunice Lipton interprets the woman's pose as an expression of her ecstatic pleasure derived from the enjoyment of her own body.¹⁶⁹ However Degas' tendency to repeat motifs indicates an interest in exploring the different phrases of motion during such activities as bathing and dancing. George Jeanniot, a friend of Degas', was present when the artist posed his model in the very manner depicted in *Nude Drying Herself* and the *After the Bath* works. He recollected,

I saw him with a model, trying to pose her in the movement of drying herself while leaning on the high padded back of a chair covered with a bathrobe. This movement is complicated. The woman being shown from the back, you see her shoulder blades, but the right shoulder, bearing the weight of the body, takes a most unexpected shape, which suggests some kind of acrobatic activity of violent effort.¹⁷⁰

The degree of difficulty in obtaining and holding the pose weakens the claim that the *After the Bath* imagery represents pleasure. This series contrasts with Degas' earlier painting, *Woman Drying Herself* (1880), in which the woman's relaxed position, lying on the floor with her legs kicking upwards, is more suggestive of Lipton's notion of personal enjoyment, relating to Degas' brothel scenes where women cavort for the client/viewer. Rather, the repeated pose used in the *After the Bath* series represents Degas' interest in exploring the

¹⁶⁸ Direct comparisons can be made between some of Degas' artworks featuring horses and the photographic experiments of Muybridge, which increase the likelihood that Degas, in some circumstances, did refer to photographs to aid his paintings and sculptures. Degas' pastel sketch, *Jockey See in Profile* (c.1887-90), and the bronze sculpture, *Rearing Horse* (1888-90), display striking similarities to Muybridge's photographs, *Annie G in Canter* and *Rearing Horse*, both included in Muybridge's publication, *Animal Locomotion*, of 1887. See Sutherland Boggs, pp. 459-463. Amongst Degas' surviving photographs are a few prints of ballerinas assuming poses similar to those depicted in his paintings, indicating that these photographs could have been used as studies for his ballerina paintings. See Kendall and DeVoyner, pp. 193-199.

¹⁶⁹ Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 177-178.

¹⁷⁰ Georges Jeanniot, 'Souvenirs sur Degas [part I]', *Revue universelle* 55, 15th October 1933, p. 159, quoted in Daniel, p. 42. The photograph *Nude Drying Herself* is one of the photographs generally attributed to Degas, however it is not universally accepted as one of Degas' photographs. Even though Jeanniot's account of the model's pose matches the pose in the photograph, he does not mention whether or not Degas actually photographed the scene. However, it seems highly likely *Nude Drying Herself* is a Degas photograph, considering that the photograph relates strongly to his paintings and drawings, which were created during a time when Degas was experimenting with photography. See Daniel, pp. 41-43 and the catalogue entry in Daniel, *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, p. 136.

female form in various states of suspended motion. Another of Degas' friends, Valéry, also recognised Degas' nudes as studies of the various movements of the human body, rather than examples of erotic imagery. Valéry wrote, 'Degas' lifelong quest was to discover in the nude, studied from every angle, in an incredible variety of poses, and even in rapid movement, the one and only linear pattern which, while *defining* a momentary pose of the body with the greatest precision, gives it the greatest possible generalization.'¹⁷¹



Fig. 64, Degas, *The Bath*, c.1895.



Fig. 65, Gérôme, *The Grand Bath at Bursa*, 1885.

Degas' depiction of the bathing body in such an awkward and uncomfortable manner sees that he translates the notion of the body at risk, evident in his ballet paintings, into a domestic setting. George T.M. Shackelford notes Degas' interest in the human back and considers Degas' pose in *After the Bath* as a statement made by the artist on its vulnerable nature.¹⁷² The woman's extreme side bend does indicate this vulnerability, not only does the pose look uncomfortable but the twist of the back is an extreme movement that places the body at risk of injury. Adding

to this precarious situation is the manner in which the woman props herself up on one leg, creating an unstable foundation for her severe pose. Unstable and hazardous poses are a

¹⁷¹ Valéry, p. 49. Richard Kendall and Jill DeVonyar also recognised Degas' interest in repetition as a manner of studying the intricacies of motion, they state, 'Turning repeatedly to certain poses – a nude wiping her back, a dancer standing in the wings – he would produce sequences of works that varied little in composition but allowed him to explore minute shifts of pose and gesture, and newly expressive combinations of form and colour.' See Kendall and DeVoyar, p. 210.

¹⁷² Shackelford, pp. 194-198.

recurring feature in Degas' bathing scenes. *The Bath* (Fig. 64) depicts a woman balanced on her left leg, her body bent forward as she raises her right leg up with both hands gripping the side of the bathtub. The deep forward bend of her body places her body at risk of losing her balance and toppling forward into the bathtub. Degas' bathing scenes contrast with conventional bathing subject-matter, which usually present the female nude in erotically charged poses and settings, evident in Jean-Léon Gerome's *The Grand Bath at Bursa* (Fig. 65).

The awkward and unstable postures of Degas' figures highlight the unusual views that the faster photographic developments of the nineteenth-century exposed. Muybridge's and Marey's experiments revealed the finer mechanics of motion, however, in Valéry's opinion Muybridge's photographic experiments revealed how differently the eye perceived motion from that of the camera lens, the eye's visual experience of motion he called, '*creative seeing* by which the understanding filled the gaps in sense perception.'¹⁷³ The subtle movements that the eye missed were captured in Muybridge and Marey's photographic experiments, thus providing views of the body previously unregistered or not recognised by the eye. It was this view of the body that appealed to Degas; photography's static format presented the in-between moments of motion which highlighted the awkward mannerisms of the body. However the photographic experiments of Muybridge and Marey presented motion in its chronological order; the eye follows the sequential phases of a figure's movements. Even though the frozen view of each individual figure was a revolutionary and awkward vision, the natural process of motion was still present as the viewer's gaze shifted over the changing states of the moving figure throughout the photographic frames.

¹⁷³ Valéry, p. 41.

Degas further emphasised the awkward views of the static figure by depicting a single instant of motion, isolating the figure from the rest of its sequential movements. Whereas the eye follows the course of time and motion as it scans Muybridge's and Marey's sequential photographs, Degas' paintings halts the viewer's gaze to one single point of time and on one single phase of motion. As viewers focus their attention on a single instant for a longer period, Degas draws their attention to the absurd and awkward appearance of the static figure. Degas replaced the fluidity of motion, as perceived by the human eye (and to an extent represented in Muybridge's and Marey's chronological photographic sequences), with an arrested moment, making ordinary actions as a woman combing her hair appear strange and peculiar. In his pastel drawing, *Woman Combing Her Hair* (Fig. 66), the woman's body appears ungainly due to the slight hunch of her shoulders and the bended angles of her right arm and her right hand holding the comb. This awkward arrangement of limbs, again, contrasts with the erotic tone usually prevalent in representations of feminine grooming, keeping in tune with Degas' recurring theme of the awkward and stressed body. Of Degas' nudes, Valéry remarked, 'Grace, obvious poetry are not his aim. His works can hardly be said to sing.'¹⁷⁴

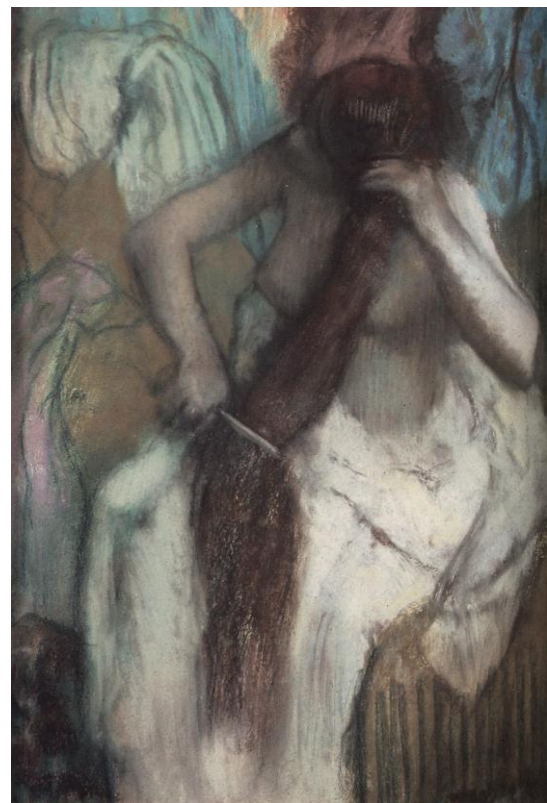


Fig. 66, Degas, *Woman Combing Her Hair*, 1887-90.

For Shackelford *Woman Combing Her Hair* expresses what he calls a 'lyrical calm'.¹⁷⁵ He makes this statement for he sees a difference between *Woman Combing Her Hair* and other works of Degas' exhibiting similar motifs,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

viewing these other works as an expression of the body's strain mixed with luxury. Yet the position of the woman's various body parts, in *Woman Combing Her Hair*, indicates that her body is under some strain. Her hair appears to be a burden on her body, indicated by her bowed head which gives the impression that her hair is heavy and weighs her down. The act of brushing also represents the repetitive daily routine the woman undergoes in order to maintain her long mane. By freezing a single moment Degas draws our attention to the physical effort exerted during this act, emphasising the body's strain and toil during motion.

The frozen moment in *Woman Combing Her Hair* encourages viewers to complete the woman's movements in their minds. This is because Degas' grooming woman represents motion derived from reality; the woman's movements are not staged but appear to be plucked from a single moment of real time. Since our experience of motion is dominated by fluidity, our minds are compelled to place Degas' single instant of time back into the context of its chronological sequence of motion. Degas' isolation of a single moment and a phase of motion reverses Valéry's notion of 'creative seeing', instead of filling in the gaps that the eye misses, and Muybridge and Marey's photographs exposed, Degas' paintings present a single scene in which viewers apply 'creative seeing' in order to visualise the entire phase of movement. Our minds then fill in the missing gaps of time that surround Degas' frozen moments.

Degas' paintings address the human visual experience and the imaginative acts the mind engages in. As Nochlin remarks, 'Degas is making strange not just the woman's body, not just the articulation of the piecemeal space that surrounds her, but the act of seeing itself.'¹⁷⁶ This 'making strange' of the visual experience was evident in the photographic experiments of Muybridge and Marey, their work revealed the discrepancy between the eye's perception

¹⁷⁵ Shackelford, p. 156.

¹⁷⁶ Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty*, pp. 128-129.

of motion and photographic reality. It is the imaginative quality of human vision that Degas concentrates on, depicting moments of time at risk of being one of those missing gaps in the visual experience, as well as encouraging the viewer to experience the entire sequence of motion as an imagined act of perception.

Bonnard's Still Spaces



Fig. 67, Bonnard, *Child Eating Lunch*, 1895.

Bonnard's early paintings often depict candid moments sourced from modern life. This changed once Bonnard began experimenting with photography: instead of representing life's candid moments, Bonnard's mid and late works portray still and reflective scenarios that express slower accounts of time.

Bonnard's photographs and early paintings derive from daily life, suggesting a spontaneous attitude to image-making. In *Child Eating Lunch* (Fig. 67) the composition

resembles the off-centre candid style prevalent in snapshot photography. The child is situated off-centre in the upper right corner, the table occupying most of the pictorial space; its dominant position encourages the viewer's gaze to travel over its surface before settling on



Fig. 68, Bonnard, *Table Scene*, c.1900.

the seated child. Bonnard draws our attention to the ordinary nature of the scenario whilst also assuming the immediate and candid compositional style customary to snapshot photography. We see this compositional style again in

Bonnard's photograph, *Table Scene* (Fig. 68). The table, with all its crockery and bottles, dominates the foreground so that our gaze must travel through this table set-up to view the two girls and the three women standing behind it.

Child Eating Lunch, along with Bonnard's earlier paintings, was painted before Bonnard began photographing his social life. The painting was, however, created in the middle of a decade when snapshot photography had grown in popularity and the visual representation of candid moments and domestic scenes had become widespread. Domestic scenarios were even represented in the earliest forms of motion cinema; in 1895 the Lumière brothers screened films featuring the feeding of a baby, *Le Repas de Bébé*, and two men fooling around with a garden hose, *L'Aroseur Arrosé*. Bonnard was acquainted with the Lumière brothers, a connection that may have had an impact on Bonnard's painting. Elizabeth Hutton Turner considers this to be the case as she notes a change in Bonnard's work post 1895, 'He invoked reality with only the simplest residue of shadow and movement. In so doing he pushed himself outside the conventional standards of painting and managed to go beyond what his compatriots could understand.'¹⁷⁷

What is apparent from Bonnard's earlier paintings is that they reflect the late nineteenth-century's penchant for rendering domestic and candid scenes of life. This casual style of Bonnard's changed after the dawn of the twentieth-century. His paintings still represented scenes of domesticity; however his earlier candid and spontaneous scenarios were replaced with still settings, evoking solemn and reflective atmospheres. For roughly twenty years, beginning in the late 1890's, Bonnard photographed his domestic surroundings. This experience with photography seemed to highlight for Bonnard the differences between painting and photography, especially in regards to the expression of time. Bonnard's

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth Hutton Turner, 'The Imaginary Cinema of Pierre Bonnard', in *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*, Ed. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2002, p. 59.

photographs are lively accounts of the fleeting moments of his social life. With his camera, he successfully captured those moments which quickly disappear just as soon as they appear. For Bonnard, it seemed that photography proved to be the most effective medium at capturing and representing the spontaneous and candid moments of daily life. After he began experimenting with photography spontaneous and candid moments of domesticity began to feature less in his paintings. A few of Bonnard's paintings still conveyed immediate expressions of time, such as *Getting Out of the Bath* (c. 1926-30) depicting Marthe frozen mid-movement as she hoists herself out of the bathtub. Overall, Bonnard's later paintings present slower accounts of time, providing a stark contrast between them and the fleeting scenes portrayed within his photographs.

Bonnard's painting *Early Spring* (Fig. 69) shares with his earlier works, and photographs, the theme of domesticity. Three children are depicted in a rural spring landscape in a scenario that at first seems to suggest a light-hearted and joyous atmosphere. However the static nature of the scene projects a disquieting air that challenges the initial impression of joy. It is Bonnard's placement of a child in the lower right corner that contributes most of all to the painting's sombre tone. The child's location in the extreme right of the scene echoes the compositional conventions of snapshot photography, yet the painting does not possess the informal candid nature of this photographic genre. Rather, the child's position appears to be consciously planned as the child's prominent position in the foreground serves as a visual anchor. Unlike *Child Eating Lunch*, the child in *Early Spring* is at the front, not in the back, of the composition so that our first point of entry resides on the child. Our gaze then follows a loop that the child instigates. Following the direction the child is facing, our gaze travels across the flower bed, turning up towards the left mid-ground where two children frolic in the garden. From here our eyes flit across the garden and countryside vista to the house on the right, finally descending down to finish where we started: the lone child in the foreground.

Travelling through the painting in this manner draws our attention to the contrasting elements of the carefree children in the spring backdrop to the quiet reflective figure of the lone child in the foreground. This child's prominent position demands our attention, thereby serving as the entry point for the viewer's gaze, as well as setting the painting's melancholic tone.

The expression of time in *Early Spring* contrasts with how Bonnard represented time in his photographs. With his photograph *Robert* (Fig. 70) Bonnard does not encourage viewers' to linger within the pictorial space, despite the similar compositional technique of situating both Robert and the child from *Early Spring* in the far right. Robert faces towards the right and is about to walk out of the right frame to an unseen destination. His imminent departure conveys the constant motion of time and presents the photograph's space as a place to quickly move through. This is reverberated by a shadow that looms on the ground behind Robert, indicating the impending arrival of another person to move through this space. These movements in and out of the photograph's frame suggest a narrative that encompasses not only the photographed scene but also the surrounding space, inaccessible to the viewer's gaze; contrasting with *Early Spring* since Bonnard encourages viewers to consider the photograph's narrative beyond what is shown within its borders.

Robert and *Early Spring's* representation of the visual experience reflects the differences between how the world is visually perceived through the camera lens and by the human eye. Our gaze holds still as Robert quickly moves through the space; his fleeting action diverting our attention away from what occupies the rest of the pictorial space. This static and superficial tone mimics the behaviour of the camera lens, which



Fig. 69, Bonnard, *Early Spring*, 1910.



Fig. 70, Bonnard, *Robert*, 1898.

must remain still in order to sharply render motion. By contrast, the visual journey we take through *Early Spring's* composition is reminiscent of our direct visual experience of life; where our gaze is mobile, continually shifting through space. This prolonged contemplation of the painting's construction and imagery encourages the viewer to reflect for longer on the image, inducing a deeper emotive response to the artwork. Hans Ulrich Obrist remarked of Bonnard's paintings, 'There is a dark side to his work that became apparent as I visited the exhibition, a poignant melancholy that increases the longer you look at.'¹⁷⁸

The eye's mobility and its connection to the mind was what highlighted the difference between painting and photography for Bonnard. The indiscriminating static gaze of the camera lens does not explore or analyse the space in front of it, rather simply recording whatever happens to occupy the visual field the moment the photograph is taken. Therefore painting, for Bonnard, provided a truer account of the eye's visual experience. He said, 'The lens records unnecessary lights and shadows, but the artist's eyes add human values to objects and reproduce them as seen through human eyes. Moreover, this visual image is mobile. Moreover, this visual image is variable.'¹⁷⁹

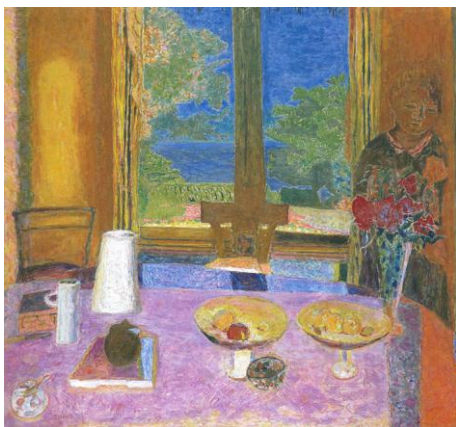


Fig. 71, Bonnard, *Dining Room on the Garden*, 1934.

As Bonnard's career progressed figures within his painting became even more static, demanding less attention, encouraging viewers to contemplate the entire space of the painting. With expressionless faces, these figures lurk within interior spaces (*Dining Room on the Garden*, 1934 [Fig. 71]), or lie motionless in the bathtub (*Nude in the Bath*, 1936).

¹⁷⁸ Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed by Peter Doig, January 2005, in Pagé, *Pierre Bonnard The Work of Art*, p. 273.

¹⁷⁹ Charles Terrasse, *Bonnard*, Paris: Floury, 1927, p. 162, quoted in Turner, *Pierre Bonnard*, p. 52.

Our gaze flits over them, amongst other things, to register a heavy tone, exacerbated by their slow expression of time.

Bonnard's experiments with photography made him aware of the differences between how the camera lens and the human eye perceive and interpret what lies in their field of vision. Paintings such as *Early Spring*, and others that followed, then appear to be a conscious effort of Bonnard's to address this difference. He reintroduced the notion of slowly evaluating a painting; a skill and/or activity perhaps under threat as people became quickly accustomed to the photography's instantaneous processes and imagery. The stationary gaze of the camera lens, for Bonnard, offered less control over the experience of time, dependent on the subject's movements in which the photographer must act quickly to capture. The eye, however, exhibits greater control as its mobility allows it to follow subjects at its own free will. Its subjective response also meant that the eye attributes different values to different subjects and objects, therefore making painting a more effective medium to express Bonnard's emotional experiences of life.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of Degas' and Bonnard's photographic and painting practices reveals how these artists expressed and experimented with time. For Degas photography was another medium to express his aesthetic interests, his photographic imagery relating closely to his paintings. This similarity was a result of Degas' demanding and perfectionist nature, ensuring he successfully represented the essence of those he knew well. By contrast, Bonnard was less concerned with the finer aspects of photographic control and more interested in depicting life's spontaneous moments. Bonnard's use of an amateur camera did not restrict him artistically, his photographs attest to his skill and creativity in capturing life's vigorous moments.

Whilst Degas dismissed faster photographic methods in his photographic experiments, he represented these faster viewpoints in his later paintings. The photographic experiments of Muybridge and Marey were the catalyst for Degas' exploration of these faster expressions of time. However, Degas' interest was fuelled not just by the intriguing arrangement of the body at a certain point of time but by the differences these photographic experiments revealed between the camera lens' and the human eye's perception of motion. Bonnard also became aware of this difference through his experience with photography, most likely contributing to the change in his painting aesthetic during the early twentieth-century. Contrasting with his own photographs, and Degas' later paintings, Bonnard's later paintings depict a slower account of time that, for the artist, was representative of his visual and emotive experiences of life; important experiences that Bonnard believed photography could not provide.

Ultimately, what links Degas and Bonnard was how they acknowledged the different viewpoints offered by the camera lens and the human eye. For both artists, photography provided a static account of life contrasting with the eye's fluid visual experience. Degas and Bonnard created imaginary pathways within their paintings, encouraging viewers to re-enact the eye's visual experience, either in the imagination or in the physical space of the painting. It was, then, the subjectivity of the viewing human agent that Degas and Bonnard both prioritised.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I demonstrated how photography's representation of time played an important part in the artistic experiments and developments in painting from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Instead of shying away from the emerging medium, painters embraced the new view of life that photographs offered; that of the static moment. Photography's ability to render its subjects' likenesses meant that, from its inception, the medium was considered an ideal vehicle to represent reality. However photography's relationship to time raises questions and doubts about its connection to reality. Photography's static moments contrast with the fluid visual experiences of the human eye. Life is not static, instead, it is in a constant state of flux, meaning that photographs can provide views not naturally compatible with real life, and our visual experiences, but, rather, present alternative views that add to, challenge and stimulate our visual and imaginative experiences. This difference was recognised by artists, whose experiments and exploration with the medium provided much needed commentary on photography's perceived objectivity.

Degas' incorporation of photographic time in his paintings encourages an imaginative response from viewers. Depicting the isolated moment, prevalent in photographs, Degas produced works with ambiguous narratives, lacking in fixed meanings. Instead, viewers had to construct for themselves the wider context from which the single moment could have derived. Likewise with Degas' later paintings, his awkward rendition of figures frozen mid-action encourages viewers to complete the flow of movement within their minds. It seems that for Degas, photography's representation of the static moment proved to be a catalyst in which to spark viewers' imaginations.

Vuillard's early photographic practice mirrored his early paintings and his daily visual experiences. As snapshot photography is capable of recording moments from the natural flow

of time, it then served as an effective medium for Vuillard to represent his visual experiences of life. However painting from his own snapshots was not always a straightforward process, Vuillard seemed to realise that the static nature of photographs was not always compatible with the fluid motion of life and the manner in which our minds remember the past. Whilst photography could provide factual information, as a catalyst for the past the medium proved to have its limitations in representing the full emotional human experience.

Of the four artists, Bonnard was the most critical of the difference in visual experiences between the camera lens and the human eye. Initially, snapshot photography attracted Bonnard, evident in his photographic output. He also used his camera to create posed photographs of Marthe, using them to aid him in his illustrative work and paintings. However, Bonnard's experience with photography made him aware of photography's failings when it came to representing our emotional experiences. Suspicious of photography's objective qualities, Bonnard turned his back on the medium, prioritising his imaginative and emotive responses to life, expressed in his paintings.

Photography helped Sickert to represent, in his paintings, his imaginative responses to life. Because of photography's ability to halt a single moment of time, Sickert could easily incorporate his own figure within his paintings. Sickert also expressed a photographic notion of time, presenting a single moment isolated from its wider context. The resulting narrative ambiguity gave Sickert the freedom to express his personal responses to life, encouraging viewers to experience a similar response. In his portraits, Sickert used the visual language of photojournalism to provide alternative views of public figures; one that portrays their characters in a more realistic manner than the conventional methods of official portraiture. Sickert, then, experimented with how photography, in some instances, provoked imaginative experiences, whilst in other examples provided us with glimpses of reality.

By looking into each artist's connection with photography, we expand our understanding of their individual creative vision. These artists proved that those who possessed strong creative sensibilities were not at risk of having their individual creativity dominated by photography's influence. Instead, what these artists sourced from photography was driven by the strength of their aesthetic concerns. They did not simply mimic photographic imagery; rather they provided artistic commentaries on how photography's expression of time challenged our visual and imaginative experiences.

As I mentioned in the introduction, a number of artists during the nineteenth-century (and into the twentieth) had incorporated photography into their artistic practices. Generally, artists' connection with photography seemed to be either repressed or unrecognised during their lifetimes, and sometimes after their deaths. Rhetoric of the nineteenth-century, continuing into the twentieth with the advent of modernism, promoted individual artistic genius, a notion that could be perceived to conflict with the mechanical and repetitive nature of photography. This sentiment was addressed by Salomon, who noted, 'But to some people, the artists suspected of complicity with the camera were thought of as forgers, and that explains the look of horror on Pierre Vebers face on seeing Vuillard boldly carrying a camera.'¹⁸⁰

The artists I have discussed are mainly remembered, and celebrated, for their contributions to painting. Outside of their little respective social and artistic circles, little was known of Degas', Vuillard's and Bonnard's photographic experiments. Degas was the only one who exhibited his photographs during his lifetime, a small and private affair held in the art supplies store of his trusted printer Tasset. However, as Parry claims, this exhibition was

¹⁸⁰ Salomon, p. 3.

more a private viewing than a public event; unlike other exhibitions of Degas', even for ones just as small and informal, there was no mention of it in the press.¹⁸¹

After their deaths, Degas', Vuillard's and Bonnard's photographs were kept hidden away in family collections and archives until the mid to late decades of the twentieth-century. In 1963 the Lefevre Gallery in London held an exhibition, 'Vuillard et son Kodak'; exhibiting Vuillard's photographs alongside some of his paintings. The catalogue featured an essay on his photographic practice by his nephew-in-law, Salomon. Bonnard's photographs were stored in family archives until the 1984 exhibition, 'Bonnard: The Late Paintings'. Jean-François Chevrier's catalogue essay, 'Bonnard and Photography', exposed Bonnard's photographic experiments to a wider audience. An exhibition dedicated to Bonnard's photographic practice was held in 1987 at the Musée d'Orsay, simply called 'Pierre Bonnard: Photographs and Paintings'.

The first recognised exhibition of Degas' photographs was held between 1998 and 1999 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. Exploration of the connection between painters, as well as artists practicing in other mediums, and photography continue to grow. Such exhibitions as 'The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso' (1999)¹⁸² and 'Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard' (2011),¹⁸³ and their accompanying catalogues, addresses how various artists incorporated photography into their creative practices. Photography has also become a common feature in retrospective exhibitions for individual artists; its inclusion forms part of the analysis into an artist's creative process. For example, the exhibitions *Edouard Vuillard* (1993), *Pierre Bonnard The Work of Art:*

¹⁸¹ See Parry, p. 79.

¹⁸² Exhibited at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dallas Museum of Art and Fundación del Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao.

¹⁸³ The Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C, The Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Suspending Time (2006) and *Degas and the Ballet: Picturing Movement* (2011) all acknowledges these artists' connection with photography.

Despite this increased exposure, there is still more work to do. Sickert, whose use of photographic study aids was widely known by the public during his lifetime, has yet to have had an exhibition or publication dedicated solely to this topic. Maybe because his connection to photography was, and is, so well recognised there does not seem to be a need to explore further this factor of his artistic practice. Considering how important photography was to Sickert, and the numerous paintings he created using photographic aids, an in-depth exploration of Sickert's connection with photography is long overdue.

By discussing the artists' photographic connections and experimentations with the notion of time, this thesis presents an analysis that goes further than simply pointing out the aesthetic similarities or differences between photography and painting. Whilst aesthetic features are important to acknowledge, deeper aspects of photography's nature was also explored by artists. Even though the medium proves highly successful at rendering likenesses, photography's static representation of time produces views that challenge our visual experiences and what we perceive to be real. Whether in the representation of narrative, memory or motion, photography provides an alternative perspective to what the human agent initially experienced or remembered. From photography's early days, artists recognised that photography's static moments raised just as many questions on the nature of reality, and the visual experience, as it did in revealing the finer details of life.

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